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The Popular Education Question in Antebellum South Carolina, 1800-1860

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The Popular Education Question in Antebellum South Carolina, 1800-1860

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DEDICATION

All praises to the Most High. This dissertation is only possible because of the Creator's providence and guidance. To my mother (Daryl) for your continued support and encouragement from the beginning. To my brothers (Robert and Marcus) who never let me forget who I am, where I am from, and where I am going; To my father (Robert) who reminded me to enjoy being a student and continue to strive as a man. To Makiera, thank you for your love, support, and patience. To Dr. Muhammad and Dr. Winford who reminded me to remain hopeful and remember those who walk this path before me. To the friends I found during this process thank you and to friends that have transitioned, thank you.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation reviews the struggle for popular education in Antebellum South Carolina. It contends that the failure of popular education in South Carolina was not a foregone conclusion nor was it mistake by school administration or state leaders, but instead, the failure to provide education for the white majority was the result of an intended goal. This project concludes that South Carolina remained without a system of public schools for the majority of citizens because those who opposed general education firmly believed popular education held the seeds of revolution while ignorance the better tool to perpetuate the status quo.

Chapter one looks to explain the intellectual underpinning that dissenters used to manipulate the Free School Act of 1811, the Free School System, and the cultural perception of the white majority toward popular education. Chapter two not only describes the plan and hope illustrated by the Free School Act of 1811 but also how dissenters used their positions of influence within the legislature to deny a favorable reception of free schools in the popular mind.

Chapter three provides a necessary detour to provide an understanding of how reformers attempted to counter dissenters control over the popular mind toward popular education. It also provides an account of reformers desires for popular education by way of social commentary on Southern society from the 1820s to the 1840s. This chapter serves

as one of the fasteners to the project because it gave readers a glimpse into what reformers were fighting for and why dissenters were fighting against.

Chapter four, Southern Dependence and Southern Education, situate how the sectional tension of the 1850s forced Southerners to rethink popular education. Chapter five demonstrated that despite the obstacles facing supporters and reformers of education they did use the opportunity of the 1850s to demand change in the state's educational policy.

Chapter six on addresses the concerns of dissenters and their articulated reasons for rejecting popular education. The final chapter suggests that the ruling class counted on the ignorance of the white majority to protect and govern the South.

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Introduction

South Carolina's educational policy toward popular education, 1710-1811

The earliest signs of education in colonial South Carolina began with the Church of England's Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. This organization looked to educate English settlers in reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as teach and convert Native Americans and Africans in America, free and enslaved, to Anglicanism¹ Religious institutions played a key role in facilitating education in colonial South Carolina and in the state of South Carolina after American independence.²

Private academies, tutors, and charity schools completed the landscape of colonial education in South Carolina. Private academies and tutors educated the wealthy while the less fortunate relied on the benevolence of individuals and organizations. In fact, the first law passed for public education in South Carolina, the Free School Act of 1710, was financed by private funds generated by wills and testaments of wealthy individuals for

¹ Henry Tazewell Thompson, *The Establishment of the Public School System of South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C.: R. L. Bryan, 1927), 2. Elsie Worthington Clews Parsons, *Educational Legislation and Administration of the Colonial Governments* (New York : Macmillan, 1899), 457. Colyer Meriwether and Edward McCrady, *History of Higher Education in South Carolina* (Washington, Govt. print. off., 1889), 13.

² David Ramsay, *The History of South-Carolina: From Its First Settlement in 1670, to the Year 1808* (David Longworth, 1809), 353.

the explicit use of creating a free school system.¹ Historians believe that the Free School Act of 1710 sought to develop an educational system for the entire colony, however, the colonial government failed to administer the law, making a well-coordinated public school system an impossibility.² The contemplation of a public education system was no small feat. If South Carolina had succeeded in creating a system of public education, it would have been a rare happening. It is important to understand that when thinking of public education as a system directed by government efforts in the colonial period was a rarity. In fact, most of the British colonists were illiterate which is a fact that highlights the fervor for education in colonial South Carolina and the rarity of the Free School Act of 1710. But it also explains why the act also failed. There was no colonial precedent nor was a free school system a necessity of the colonial economy. Therefore, governmental action ultimately failed to produce a create a proper public education system in colonial South Carolina

Nonetheless the failure of the Free School Act of 1710 did not prevent the belief that schools were needed in South Carolina. For instance, the South Carolina colonial legislature, “The fact that from 1737 to 1776 the legislature continued to pass acts for establishing schools.”³ Colonial efforts in behalf of public education by South Carolina leaders during the colonial period has garnered the attention of historians. For example,

¹ Parsons, *Educational Legislation and Administration of the Colonial Governments*, 448. The legislation also included the assurance that teachers were well compensated. Organized in 1712 by the legislature, the private funds bought land, gave provisions for the schoolmasters, and allowed 12 scholars to attend for free.

² Meriwether and McCrady, *History of Higher Education in South Carolina*, 14.B. James (Burr James) Ramage, *Local Government and Free Schools in South Carolina. First Part Read before the Historical Society of South Carolina, December 15, 1882* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University, 1883), 34. South Carolina Dept of Agriculture, *South Carolina: Resources and Population. Institutions and Industries* (Walker, Evans & Cogswell, printers, 1883), 447. 7.

³ Thompson, *The Establishment of the Public-School System of South Carolina*, 5.

historian Judith R. Joyner claimed, “the small province of South Carolina probably came closer to establishing and maintaining a system of public education than did any of the other Southern colonies, and indeed closer than did most middle colonies, including New York and Pennsylvania.”⁴ In addition, historian Charles Dabney noted, “in no American colony was there a deeper interest in education among the intelligent whites than in South Carolina.”⁵

Benevolent organizations and individuals not only sustained the devotion to the notions of general education but also financed the majority of the free schools in colonial South Carolina. For instance, David Ramsay noted, James Childs and parishioners in 1733 a free-school was erected at Childbusy in St. John’s parish. In 1734 another free school was established in Dorchester for public use and was maintained by benevolent individuals. Organizations that aided in public education included The Fellowship Society and the Winyaw Indigo Society, and the former was founded in 1769 and the latter in 1756. Both organizations held poor and orphaned children as the chief recipients of their labor. Several organizations before and after the American War for Independence followed the pattern of providing education for a few scholars, mainly those who could not afford to educate themselves.⁶

There was more support for general education shortly before the War for Independence. Historian Thomas Pope found requests for education as early as the 1760s

⁴ Judith R. Joyner, *Beginnings: Education in Colonial South Carolina* (Museum of Education, McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina, 1985), 3.

⁵ Charles William Dabney, *Universal Education in the South* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 5.

⁶ Ramsay, *The History of South-Carolina*, 257.

and 1770s by upcountry regulators, those who desired for legal protection of property, and by the town of Ninety-Six.⁷ In May 1776 as part of a list of grievances presented to the general assembly by citizens of the town of Ninety-Six criticized the government of South Carolina for “the want of Places of Public Worship and Free Schools.”⁸ From the revolutionary period until 1811, there were multiple bills introduced to the South Carolina General Assembly to establish schools in various locales. The town of Ninety-Six was the biggest advocate for the establishment of general education in the state. In 1783, its inhabitants proposed the sale of 128 acres of land, “and applying the money arising from sales thereof, to and for the uses of learning at the town of Ninety-Six, and for the laying out a common for the use of said Town.”⁹ The author was unable to discover any evidence that determined if land was sold for the purpose of building free schools.

Historians of Southern education, such as Edgar Knight contended that the educational policy toward public education in the South grew out of contention and indifference. However, despite the contentious history of educational policy toward popular education, there was consistent discourse in support of the establishment of popular education throughout the South in the late 1790s and early 1800s, particularly in

⁷ Thomas H. Pope, *The History of Newberry County, South Carolina: 1749-1860* (University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 213.

⁸ 1776 South Carolina General Assembly, *Journal of the General Assembly of South Carolina, September 17, 1776* (Printed for the Historical Commission of South Carolina by the State Company, 1909), 46-47.

⁹ South Carolina, *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina: Containing the Acts from 1786, Exclusive, to 1814, Inclusive, Arranged Chronologically. Id.*, 1839. Xxxii, 818 P (A.S. Johnston, 1839), 574-575. William J Cooper, Tom E Terrill, and Christopher Childers, *The American South: A History*, 2017, 58-59.

South Carolina.¹⁰ Discourse on popular education never vanished from the mouth of educational advocates of South Carolina.¹¹

Governor Arnoldus Vanderhorst in 1797 urged in his governor's message for the state to recognize the importance of education in relation to a free government. He implored the legislature to develop a plan to begin educating the public at large and at the public's charge. Initially, Governor Vanderhorst's ideas were well received. The General Assembly of South Carolina responded by creating a special committee to devise a plan for schools, which the committee soon after devised. However, if there was a debate on the bill it seemingly met a hostile reception because South Carolina's General Assembly tabled the bill and eventually the bill died.¹²

Speculating on the death of Governor Vanderhorst's bill provides a glimpse into the struggle for public education in South Carolina. The division in the legislature between materialists and idealists led to the bill's demise. Materialists desired education or the diffusion of knowledge to be directed towards and aligned with the political economy of slavery, while the latter group determined to move beyond the material and call for education to redress class and status inequalities to strive for a better society and

¹⁰ Edgar Wallace Knight, *Public Education in the South* (Ginn, 1922), 161. Edward Magdol and Jon L. Wakelyn, *The Southern Common People: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Social History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 61, Demonstrates the common conversation in which this paper will discuss: "from 1802 until the establishment of public schools in 1839 scarcely a year passed without some mention of the subjects in the legislature. every governor except two from 1802 until 1838 recommended the establishment of a public school."

¹¹ J. Isaac Copeland, "The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868" 1957, 133.

¹² John Furman Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina* (State Company, 1925), 116-117. *The Charleston Courier* committed a few thoughts to the hopes of seeing education established by the state for the majority. In 1803, an article noted, "we see great incomes wasted, great grandeur in equipage...but we do not see the country studded up and down with those precious jewels of a state, free schools." Carolina, *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*. Thompson, *The Establishment of the Public School System of South Carolina*.

better social relationships.

The earliest calls for popular education suggest many reformers and advocates for popular education were fighting for justice for the less wealthy with equal hopes of restraining the growth of aristocratic power and imbuing society with better relationships, based on more intellectual and economic equality, between "free men," using governmental power. This suggests that the struggle between idealists and materialists over popular education centered on the debate over the government's role in education and improving society. For instance, Richard Beresford of South Carolina expressed the hopes of idealists. He sought to reduce the power of the wealthy through government-sponsored public education, which he articulated in his 1797 pamphlet, "Aristocracy the bane of Liberty, Learning the Antidote," Education, Beresford argued, was the best way to elevate the lower classes, which he believed was the business of representatives and leaders of state government. He had hoped general education would help to steer the lower classes away from following useless and selfish leaders who oppressed them. With formal knowledge, Beresford argued, the masses could resist the merry go round of passing from, "one form of systematic oppression of tyrants and ecclesiastics to another."¹³ He believed education would provide a defense from manipulation by the few and powerful, and give the masses the power to judge matters more critically and more importantly for themselves.¹⁴ A culture of inequality bothered reformers enough to seek

¹³ Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina*, 68.

¹⁴ Ibid, 113. Beresford called on republicans to develop a plan to diffuse education. Beresford accused, all who refuse or remained indifferent to support the endeavor of popular education were supports of despotism and lacked nobleness.

popular education as a form of justice, which reformers pursued throughout the early national and antebellum periods.

The public education of the citizens of South Carolina remained a significant goal for several leaders of South Carolina. For instance, Francis Marion, a leader in Colonial South Carolina, continued to be an important advocate for public education in South Carolina, after the establishment of statehood. His advocacy, along with that of other reformers, led to passage of the Free School Act of 1811.¹⁵ Francis Marion advocated general education for the majority as a method to ensure they were able to discern and judge matters for themselves, gain the ability to understand government, and for men to wholeheartedly defend the government.¹⁶ In advocating for popular education, he warned penny-pinching legislators not to hold back on the matter of education. Marion stated, “God preserve our Legislature from penny wit and pound foolishness. What! Keep a nation in ignorance rather than vote a little of their own money for education!”¹⁷ Marion posited that ignorance could only be challenged if the state took up the task of popular education and any good government would not hesitate to bestow education on its citizens.

The promotion of education for the benefit of the white majority's sake as well as for the defense of republican government were serious aspirations of early advocates. The pursuit of popular education as government responsibility to ensure the white masses had a good understanding of useful sciences and the functions of government were beliefs

¹⁵ Meriwether and McCrady, *History of Higher Education in South Carolina*, 110.

¹⁶ Ibid, 117.

¹⁷ Ibid, 117.

that challenged the conventional ideas of world society that held education as a responsibility of the individual.

However, the ideas of these early supporters were not created in a vacuum. Historian Edgar Knight noted that there were addresses and the calls for education by the leading men of the nation, including Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. Their attitudes towards public education influenced others to consider the educational and intellectual needs of society. Knight noted, “public utterances (such as those from Jefferson and Washington) reflected the growing belief that education should be suitably and adequately provided so that the people could properly appreciate and thoroughly understand and defend their natural, civil, and political rights.”¹⁸ In the early republic, when American leaders were thinking of ways to socialize the former colonists to embrace the American Republic, “schools and the means of education were regarded as the mortal enemy to arbitrary and despotic government; they were the surest basis of liberty and equality.”¹⁹[

The increasing public discourse about popular education did bear some fruit. Following the American War for Independence, various districts in South Carolina petitioned for free schools, newspapers were attacked for not discussing the issue of free schools, and with pro-education leaders like Francis Marion, South Carolina seemed ready to support free schools. A bill to establish free schools throughout the state was drawn and submitted in 1811. The bill passed the state house of representatives by a vote

¹⁸ Knight, *Public Education in the South*, 117.

¹⁹ Ibid, 117.

of seventy-two to fifteen and passed the Senate without roll-call: “the Free School Act of 1811 established in each district and parish free schools equal in number to the representatives in the Lower House. Elementary instruction was to be imparted to all white pupils free of charge, preference being given to poor orphans and the children of indigent parents.”²⁰

A South Carolina newspaper hailed the passing of the Free School Act of 1811 as a necessary foundation for the enlightenment of citizens and a proper complement to universal suffrage. The newspaper insisted that education would give the power of the government and society to the disenfranchised and illiterate white majority. Echoing Marion and Beresford, the newspaper indicated that by providing education to the majority, the majority would gain the ability to judge and supervise themselves and the leaders with whom they have trusted as representatives with proper discernment. The passage of the Free School Act of 1811 was a victory for public education supporters and those seeking to diminish the power of aristocracy and develop a more democratic society.²¹

This dissertation reviews the struggle for popular education in Antebellum South Carolina. It contends that the failure of popular education in South Carolina was not a foregone conclusion or a mistake by school or state leaders but rather the failure to provide education for the white majority was an intended goal. This project concludes that South Carolina remained without a system of public schools for the majority of

²⁰ Meriwether and McCrady, *History of Higher Education in South Carolina*, 111.

²¹ Knight, *Public Education in the South*, 131.

citizens because those who opposed the education of the white majority firmly believed popular education held the seeds of revolution while ignorance proved itself as stabilizers of society.

This dissertation rests on the contention between reformers and dissenters' views on popular education. On the one hand, it argues that reformers, by and large, struggled for popular education to improve societal relations, between upper and lower class white, on the basis that society was unstable and that the relations between classes were becoming increasingly oppressive. On the other hand, it argues that dissenters, by and large, rejected popular education because they felt that society was not unstable. They claimed that if popular education were to develop it would act as a destabilizer.

This dissertation traces reformers' belief that southern society among white was becoming more inequitable and that general education was necessary to reduce inequality among whites, which was created by inequality of wealth upheld by the political economy, and those opposing general education. However, dissenters, who opposed public education, held an undeniable faith in the political economy of Southern society and sought to block any perceived threat to its stability. Although reformers were not seeking to overturn southern society, dissenters were not willing to see "what would happen," if the Southern white masses were educated. As a result, the educational philosophy of the South, particularly South Carolina, followed the assumed needs of a slave society where the majority were receivers of knowledge, rather than conductors of knowledge. Dissenters believed the role of the state was to protect the status quo and not usurp it.

The battle over public education between dissenters and reformers continued from 1800 to 1860. This battle, centers on reformers and dissenters' discourse on the state's responsibility to provide educational opportunities for the majority of its white citizens. The discourse and actions of reformers and dissenters may also be characterized as a cultural struggle in which each side attempted to sway the cultural attitudes and values of white South Carolinians, so that they would either accept or reject an educational policy that included extending education to the majority of whites. Reformers desired an extended education policy and dissenters distrusted popular education and its revolutionary potential on the masses and society.

Written history on Southern Education gained popularity in the early 20th century. Edgar Knight wrote the first definitive work on public education in the South. Knight's *Public Education in the South*, published in 1922, surveyed the history of educational progress in the South. He began his study by investigating European antecedents and ends in the early 20th century. Knight found that the South had a tangled history of universal education, arguing that "the principles of universal education and the equality of educational opportunity have in theory gradually found rather wide acceptance in the South, but their practical application has been surprisingly slow."²²

In 1936, Charles William Dabney wrote a two-volume work on *Universal Education in the South*. Volume one is a comprehensive account of the struggle for universal education and narrates the struggle for public education on a state by state basis. Dabney described the history of the debate about universal education from the

²² Knight, *Public Education in the South*, 117.

colonial times to 1900 by accounting for the men, women, and ideas, and institutions that promoted and set up education facilities and institutions in the South. The second volume focused on universal education since 1900.

State surveys on public education were published alongside the regional narratives of Dabney and Knight. For instance, John Thomason's *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina* was published in 1925 and Henry Thompson's *The Establishment of the Public School System of South Carolina* was published in 1927. Both Knight and Thomason provide a history of education in South Carolina. Beyond Thomason's and Thompson's histories of South Carolina education, the next best source with emphasis on South Carolina's antebellum history, particularly the free school movement, is a 1957 dissertation by James Copeland "The movement for free public schools in South Carolina to 1868." Regarding education in the colonial period, Judith R. Joyner's 1985 book, *Beginnings: Education in Colonial South Carolina*, provides the best foundation.

Several works that discussed South Carolina educational history sought to vindicate South Carolina's educational reputation. These works written in the late 19th century include the following: B. James Ramage's 1882 publication, *Local Government and Free Schools in South Carolina*; R. Means Davis's "A Sketch of Education in South Carolina," published in 1882; Edward McGrady's "Education in South Carolina Prior to and During the Revolution," a paper delivered in 1883; and Colyer Meriwether's 1889 work, *History of Higher Education in South Carolina*.²³

²³ Ramsay, *The History of South-Carolina*, Ramsay's is the origin of writers seeking to overturn the negative perception; Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*. Knight, *Public Education in the South*. Copeland, "The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868"; Joyner, *Beginnings*. Ramage, *Local Government and Free Schools in South Carolina. First Part Read before the Historical*

The publication of general histories, regional histories, and topical histories of Southern education have continued. Regional histories such as Sarah Hyde's 2016 *Schooling in the Antebellum South: The Rise of Public and Private Education in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama* sought to overturn the perception that Southerners lacked the desire for education during the antebellum period. Hyde argues that Southern desires were much greater than previously discussed in the historiography and contended that it is inaccurate to collapse Southern educational history into a story of educational neglect.

This manuscript builds on but rejects Hyde's thesis. It agrees that collapsing Southern education into a history of neglect is an incomplete view of Southern educational history. However, this project focuses on the struggle over popular education in Antebellum South Carolina and situates the story of neglect as a strategy among those who opposed general education rather than viewing the South as lethargic to education. This project demonstrates the function of neglecting general education by arguing that neglect was a strategy of the ruling class to maintain the status quo.

There has also been an increased concentration on Southern women's educational history, as well as education on higher education for men. Recent works include Christie Farnham's *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South*, published in 1995, and Timothy J. Williams's

Society of South Carolina, December 15, 1882; Meriwether and McCrady, History of Higher Education in South Carolina; Edward McCrady, Education in South Carolina Prior to and During the Revolution: A Paper Read Before the Historical Society of South Carolina 6th August, 1883 (News and Courier Book Presses, 1883).

Intellectual Manhood: University, Self, and Society in the Antebellum South published in 2015.²⁴

Southern Education historiography with a focus on white education continues to accumulate, and this project adds to this history. A focus on white education gives a unique perspective into Southern antebellum history by placing the dominant institution of slavery and the enslaved majority on the periphery of white Southern educational history. The project contends that because African American were excluded from education in South Carolina during the colonial period, African Americans' presence did not have a significant influence on the history of legislation on popular education and the free school movement in South Carolina. As much of the recent historiography have placed race or slavery at the center of their studies, I believe this dissertation takes a less popular position by focusing on the relationship between whites, mainly white men of different statuses and classes in order to ascertain the function of knowledge and ignorance within Southern civilization.

Several writers have discussed the failure of popular education in the antebellum South. Cloyer Meriwether and Edward McCrady, W.E. B. Du Bois, and James Anderson have argued that the failure of public education in the South, particularly South Carolina was the result of the planter class rejecting public education for the white masses and the

²⁴ Several dissertations have also been written pertaining to Southern education such as Keith Whitscarver's "Political Economy, Schooling, and Literacy in the South: A Comparison of Plantation and Yeoman Communities in North Carolina, 1840-1880;" Janis Greenough, "Resistance to the Institutionalization of Schooling in the Antebellum Southern Highlands;" Michael Surgue's, "South Carolina College: The Education of an Antebellum Elite" and more recently taking an international approach is Jamie Wilson's "Proslavery Thinking in the antebellum South Carolina: Higher Education, Transatlantic encounters, and the Life of the Mind." Despite several sources that have become available of late, Southern educational history is without synthesis and more importantly within historical memory, Southern educational history during the antebellum period remains either non-existent or severely underdeveloped without explanation or contrary examples.

white majority unwillingness to reconsider the potential education for to alter their life chances.²⁵ However, scholarship has rarely explored the depth of such claims. Historians have yet to investigate the guiding motivations for Southern ignorance and the neglect of popular education. Nor have historians qualified how the planter class dominated the lower classes in the arena of education and how the lower classes came to accept planter domination.²⁶

The lack of public education in antebellum South Carolina was not merely the result of power and wealth domination by a small elite. Southern historians and histories have placed great emphasis on Southern culture in understanding the South. When discussing Southern education, there is no reason to depart from the importance of culture.²⁷ Thus, as Meriwether and Du Bois rightly said, there was a class of persons that denied education to the white majority, but they did not explain how the planter class denied education to the white majority in South Carolina. The nearest [unclear] studies that discuss the interplay between education and culture are E. Merton Coulter's 1925 article, "A Georgia Educational Movement During the Eighteen Hundred Fifties," and Bruce Eelman's 2004 article, " 'An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved': The Struggle for Common Schools in Antebellum Spartanburg, South

²⁵ Colyer Meriwether *History of Higher Education*, 115-116; W.E.B Du Bois *Black reconstruction*, 638-640; James Anderson *The education of blacks in the South*, 4. Irving Gershenberg, "Southern Values and Public Education: A Revision," 414-415. Irving Gershenbeg argued that the South's educational "backwardness" cannot be attributed to any lack of interest in education on the part of the people of the region; instead, the educational underdevelopment was due to the lack of interest to public education by those who exercised political power. The elites' had a strong inclination towards individualism.

²⁶ Blurring the lines [dividing attention]; society makes the abstract relationship of whiteness greater than material conditions experienced

²⁷ Sir Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law* (John Murray Albemarle., 1908), 15. Southern culture is not a topic easily reified, but the Southern distinction is not only the result of conflict and economy but a reflection of values developed in consequences to geography, conflict, and economy, as well as proactive activities within Southern institutions, such as family, church, enslaved community, and traditions.

Carolina,” and most recently, Keri Merritt in chapter five of her recent book *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, published in 2017. Aligning with Coulter, Du Bois, and Merritt, this project argues that the ruling class deliberately withheld education from the white majority, which kept the white majority in a state of illiteracy.²⁸ Unlike these histories which discuss culture to an extent. This project underscores the moldable characteristic of culture to explain planter hegemony and the majority’s reluctance to accept popular education.

Before continuing, it should be noted that the use of the word majority references the white majority, nevertheless as Peter Wood has illustrated, South Carolina had a black majority. The educational policy towards the enslaved paralleled the philosophy of education of the white majority. Wood noted that as a closed society fostering ignorance, South Carolina, “placed a high premium upon fostering ignorance and dependence within the servile labor force.”²⁹ Although Peter Wood emphasized the ignorance nurtured among the enslaved black population his words transcend race and what this project will show is that not only was ignorance and dependency cultivated among the enslaved but the white majority as well.

The story of Southern education begins with Southern culture, more specifically Southern attitudes toward education. Few scholars tend to agree on the importance of the relationship between education and culture. For instance, John Hardin Best noted that “[Southern] culture...is ultimately the educator of the South.”³⁰ Best, in his article

²⁸ Eelman, Bruce W. 2004. "An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved": The Struggle for Common Schools in Antebellum Spartanburg, South Carolina," *History of Education Quarterly*. 44, no. 2: 250.

²⁹ Peter Wood, *Black Majority* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 105.

³⁰ John Hardin Best, “Education in the Forming of the American South.”

“Education in the Forming of the American South,” argued that Southern education was a by-product of Southern culture. He insisted that to understand education in the South, historians must deal with Southern geography, people, and institutions.³¹ The influence of Southern culture is rightly posited because culture is the ultimate educator of every society; nonetheless, concerning Southern education, historians have neglected to inform us of who taught, developed, made, and had the most considerable influence on Southern culture.³²

Regarded as a state that did not develop a system of public education prior to the 1868 state constitution, the history of popular education in South Carolina is often depicted as a static historical narrative. Institutional and social histories discuss the rise and fall of the Free School System, influential figures of South Carolina’s educational history, prominent colleges, and academies. Histories on South Carolina education often omit contest and conflict. However, this dissertation contends that an accurate depiction of South Carolina policy towards popular education presents anything but a static narrative mostly because a static narrative is inconsistent with human nature and the malleability of culture. Moreover, a static view of any history makes it seem as if culture does not need upkeep, regular preservation, and reinforcement.³³

³¹ John Hardin Best, “Education in the Forming of the American South,” *History of Education Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1996): 48.

³² John Hardin Best, “Education in the forming of the South.” 44-47

³³ This dissertation seeks to break away from the tradition of view South Carolina’s history as static. The hopes of demonstrating that culture is malleable. Emphasizing culture is important to denote the fact that culture requires reinforcement. Thus, in the case of popular education, each class in society had to be reminded of its relationship to education, this was often done in the reinforcing certain cultural attitudes and molding an environment were those attitudes were acted upon.

The historiographical depiction of popular education in South Carolina is mostly histories from one side (the winning side) of the conflict and contest that occurred over popular education within the theatre of cultural attitudes. It is not a coincidence that multiple historians have concluded, mainly from a static perspective, that the planter class withheld education from the majority, who, because of faith in republicanism rejected educational opportunities in the form of free schools. What is missing from such narratives is why the planter class withheld education, how members of the planter class were able to resist educating the white majority, and how the lower class consistently concluded that education was not a necessity nor advantageous to their interests. What is absent from the narrative is conflict and how dissenting views popular education within the Southern culture won out over ideas and arguments that sought to reconfigure the cultural attitudes toward popular education in antebellum South Carolina.

In being consistent in emphasizing the malleability of culture, this project explains that the devaluing of popular education was never a foregone conclusion. It contends that the failure of popular education in South Carolina was the result of constant and consistent maintenance and reaffirmation of values that projected public education as dishonorable and a sign of dependency. Drawing on the framework of conflict, this project illustrates that arguments against popular education did not stand alone. Dissenters to popular education had to perpetually nullify any idea or action that attempted to reform the cultural perception of general education. Persistent challenges to the cultural ideas that diminished the value of general education by educational advocates are present throughout the antebellum period and demonstrate a struggle over popular education in antebellum South Carolina in which on the eve of the Civil War, the

dissenters to public education held the advantage. The story presented in this dissertation emphasizes the making, upholding, and challenge to the cultural attitudes toward popular education. The debate, struggle, and battle over popular education in South Carolina provide a unique perspective on the relationship between South Carolina's culture and the non-development of popular education.

Chapter one explores how the philosophy of republicanism primarily shaped southern cultural attitudes toward general education. This chapter also discusses how cultural attitudes perpetuated by dissenters swayed the white majority to resist popular education by constructing a defense against popular education on republican ideology.

Chapter two discusses the making of the Free School Act of 1811 a law that benefitted the poor and subsequent sabotage of the Free School System as events that culturally reinforced the supposed worthlessness of popular education from 1808 to the 1840s.

Chapter three provides a glimpse into the mind of advocates by exploring the desires for popular education and their struggle with societal inequality and the ruling class which covers the time between 1820 to the late 1840.

Chapter four demonstrates how sectional tension of the late 1840s and the 1850s influenced the discourse on education in the South.

Chapter five covers the momentum gained by advocates of popular education in the 1850s, and their attempt to challenge the status quo and reform cultural attitudes toward popular education, and thwart dissenters' mental advantage.

As supporters of education gained momentum in the 1850s, chapter six provides a glimpse into the position and mindset of dissenters.

Chapter seven reflects on the dissenting ruling class's employment of cultural attitudes, mainly republicanism, to deceive the white majority into the mental trap of devaluing popular education. The goal of the dissenters was to preserve society's faith in the political economy and provide themselves with near absolute authority over South Carolina's majority and its institutions.

Chapter 1

Ideology, Habit, Order, and Education, 1800-1860

Republicanism

The undergirding philosophies of the Southern mind of both the elite and the masses in the 19th century are vital to understanding why popular education failed in South Carolina in the antebellum era. This chapter explains the philosophy of republicanism and briefly explores the effects on education. In addition to republicanism, this chapter discusses philosophies of natural order and class prejudices that also influenced the discourse on the popular education movement. It explains how dissenters assembled a construct of republicanism that served as a significant cultural impediment to the establishment of popular education in South Carolina. Republican ideology in South Carolina, as in many places in the United States, was the predominant force undergirding all cultural institutions and practices.¹ Intentionally and unintentionally, republicanism created a stiff resistance to popular education among its practitioners.

Republicanism may be defined as an ideology that rejected monarchical and aristocratic forms of government and also rejected flamboyancy, inequality, and subjugation. Historian R. Freeman Butts noted, "The slightest indication of aristocracy'-

¹ Jean Baker, "From Belief into Culture: Republicanism in the Antebellum North," *American Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1985): 538.

polished mannerism, perhaps, or a well-timed phrase-was potentially punishable by social ostracism.”¹ The ideology of republicanism is very complicated; it has often meant different things to different persons depending on relationships, situations, and historical periods.¹

Republicanism has multiple principles that help to express and explain its function. Of the several principles, equalitarianism serves as the dominant principle to republican ideology. Republicanism stressed equality among all individuals, which carried the tenets of equality, freedom, and independence; however, the meanings of equality, independence, and freedom were culturally, communally, and individually defined. There is no consistent definition of any of these tenets; they are defined and weighed based on individual situations that challenged individual, family, or group reputation. To a great extent, republicanism depended on how and when honor and dishonor manifested. For instance, having the ability to educate one’s own family was a demonstration of one’s independence, equality, and freedom but those who attended public schools were deemed as dependent, unequal, and under some form of subjugation by community receiving assistance regardless of need violated republican ideology, and the violation of republican ideology meant the lowering of reputation deeming the individual, family, and community as dishonorable.

Republican ideology depended upon the practice of honor and dishonor. Republicanism reified honor by arranging rewards, punishment, discontentment, and

¹ Butts, *A History of Education in American Culture*, 142.

¹ Robert E. Shalhope, “Republicanism Liberalism, and Democracy: Political Culture in the Early Republic,” 55.

contentment within the psyche of republican practitioners. Honor as an idea provided the basis to sustain a behavior, condemn a behavior or defend an action that either upheld or violated republicanism. Honor reinforced republicanism and at times acted as a synonym. For instance, whatever act or idea was perceived as un-republican or violating republicanism, the act was also viewed as dishonorable forcing the individual to respond by upholding the established and approved republican action or face dishonor. Thus, those who sent their children to a free school violated republican ideology and their actions were judged as dishonorable, and as a result, their reputation also suffered,² Because sending a child to a free school implied that one was not independent enough to pay for one's education Honor was the protection of reputation and self-worth; thus, anything that lowered the individual, family, or community's worth was viewed as shameful, and dishonorable, which required rejection by those deemed dishonorable or troubled by the shame of self-conviction Honor was the instinctual and emotional judge that made the consequences of violating or upholding republicanism.³ The tenets of republicanism are never strictly defined. Republican ideology had boundaries and guidelines, but the latitude of republicanism was often the decision of the individual, group, or family to determine.⁴ The fluidity of republicanism allowed it to become a dominant concept/ideology adopted and utilized by all classes.⁵

² Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, Reprint edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 27.

³ Wyatt-Brown, 27.

⁴ On honor see Wyatt-Brown, 26-39; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 19.

⁵ Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (OUP USA, 1991), 95. David Brown, "A Vagabond's Tale: Poor Whites Herrenvolk Democracy, and the Value of

The greatest objective of republicanism was to maintain liberty. Liberty meant autonomy, equality and control of persons, property, and family. The loss of liberty not only meant dependence, inequality, and dishonor but was equated to slavery. Republicanism as a standard or a scale was used to measure and protect liberty above all things. Thus, when republicanism was maintained, it also meant liberty was secured. Republicanism to a great extent was the fear of powerlessness. Most white Americans had come to despise either by experience, teaching, or propaganda the idea of powerlessness and subjugation, which they thought was dishonorable, and must be fought against, no matter the cost. Historian Lacy Ford noted, “in antebellum South Carolina, every man became a hotspur when his own independence was threatened.”⁶

Understanding the influence of republicanism over the inhabitants of South Carolina makes it easier to conceive the fact that those who held power to influence the perception of honor, judge the presence of liberty, and evaluate the merit of equality, held a great amount of power over the thoughts and behavior of the masses of white Southerners.

The lack of a consistent standard of republicanism also provided an opportunity for the rulers of the South to capitalize on their authority over the majority. Those with power and influence often set the bar of perception, established judgments, and set the parameters of ideas which violated or supported republicanism to their benefit before those with less power had a chance to define it for themselves. In short, those with power

Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South,” *Journal of Southern History* 79, no. 4 (November 2013): 813-825.

⁶ Ibid, 95.

determined worth and set customs. In the case of education, those in power set the perception of access to public education. The moment the ruling class classified and articulated the judgment that equated free schools with pauper institutions, the less wealthy were left to choose between honor without education and dishonor with education.⁷

Republicanism was not only an internal evaluation but also an external instrument of evaluation which informed internal worth. Thus, the opinions and perception of honorable persons greatly mattered. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown informs us that “the opinion of others not only determined rank in society but also affected the way men and women thought.”⁸ Despite the vastness and complex reality of republican ideology, there are two things certain about republicanism. It helped to stabilize Southern society by drawing a community of minds to cooperative standards and ideas. And two, the fluidity of republicanism, seemingly allowed all free men to be responsible for their own interests, liberty, equality, and independence.

Habits contrary to education.

Equalitarianism

Critical to republican ideology was the belief in the equality between white men regardless of talent, education, status, or wealth. Historian Bill Cecil-Fronsman explained the connection between equality and republicanism this way: “republicanism required that the principles of equality be achieved not only in politics but also in day to

⁷ Historian Lacy Ford, noted, “it [Republicanism] grew more rather than less problematic as it strained to accommodate challenges to its coherence generated by the market revolution.” Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (OUP USA, 1991), 226.

⁸ Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*.

day life. With strong cultural memories of the deferential behavior required of their Old-World ancestors, and with the presence of a class of slaves reminding them of what could happen to those who had lost their independence and equality, common whites would bear no sign of humiliation.”⁹ For instance, popular education directed at the poor, which carried the stigma of being for the poor, indicated that those who attended free schools lost the perception of equality. Thus, if a person or family accepted popular education, according to republicanism, they were marked as dishonorable and deplorable. Consequently, rejecting popular education particularly for lower class whites, meant they had sustained their honor and equality to others. Not only that, rejecting free schools was an honorable achievement, and the avoidance of free schools provided a reason to boast.¹⁰ The concept of equalitarianism made it easy for those who opposed popular education to use the strong desire of southerners to maintain the status of equality to convince the lower class to forego popular education. By continually deeming free schools as pauper institutions or as we shall see in the next chapter, never allowing the Free School System to reform and progress, was a grand strategy that ensured the lower classes would continue to devalue public schools.

The Ideology of Individualism, a branch of republicanism

Nothing exaggerated the spirit or helped to explain the ideology of republicanism like the branch of individualism.¹¹ Individualism was characterized by a spirit of disdain

⁹ Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 52; Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 31. Brown noted, “similarly, poor whites in the old South were subjected to the ancient prejudice against menials, swineherds, peddlers, and beggars.”

¹⁰ Ibid, 52.

¹¹ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1941), 32-33.

for external overreach and the belief that one's life was the responsibility of one's self or the responsibility of the head of the household. The perception of the individual, group, or community determined the function and boundary of individualism. Regarding popular education, the branch of individualism is far more emphasized, although, it operated in tandem with equalitarianism. The people of South Carolina held to the beliefs of self-exertion and pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps even when one owned no boots. The concept of "do it on your own" or "do for self," fueled not only the belief in independence (a show of liberty) but also a hatred toward charity or anything that resembled its likeness because any form of alms was perceived as dependency. Consequently, individualism reinforced the rejection of popular education, because popular education was viewed as a benevolent and pauper institution.¹²

Therefore, state funding for the support of popular education was perceived and judged as charity, which contradicted the responsibility of the individual and consequently, many families, although very poor, would do their best to avoid being associated with any charitable institutions, especially public education.¹³

Individualism was so entrenched in the Southern psyche that it often caused both dissenters and advocates of popular general education to agree to abandon education if it conflicted with the tenet of individualism. By way of illustration, supporters yielded to the spirit of individualism even if it meant illiteracy. W.F. Cash noted:

¹² David Duncan Wallace, *The History of South Carolina* (American Historical Society, Incorporated, 1934), 460; Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 37.

¹³ James W Ely, "'There Are Few Subjects in Political Economy of Greater Difficulty': The Poor Laws of the Antebellum South," *LSI Law & Social Inquiry* 10, no. 4 (1985): 874.

Hardly one, in truth, ever concerned himself about the systematic raising of the economic and social level of the masses. And if occasional men like my Irishman kept free schools for their neighborhoods, these same men would take the lead in indignantly rejecting the Yankee idea of universal free schools maintained at the public charge-would condemn the run of Southern whites to grow up in illiteracy and animal ignorance in the calm conviction of acting entirely for the public good.¹⁴

For Southerners, supporting individualism was more important than public education, not because they viewed general education as completely useless but rather because they viewed public education as a violation of the principle of individualism. They valued their reputation to stand on their own, without outside help, more than they valued education.

Individualism also connoted distrust of external control.¹⁵ The contempt for overreach by "foreign powers" often translated into a disdain for anything centralized and uniform. Thus, when supporters of popular education petitioned to reform the Free School System in South Carolina, which included the need for the creation of the office for a superintendent and normal schools, dissenters would counter their opinions by reminding audiences that normal schools and an office of superintendent would not only increase taxes, but would lead to more centralization and uniformity, which directly conflicted with the ideology of individualism. Unless supporters or reformers could have

¹⁴ Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 78.

¹⁵ Cash, 33. "the tradition contained also, and as its ruling element, an intense distrust of, and, indeed, downright aversion to, any actual exercise of authority beyond the barest minimum essential to the existence of the social organism."

developed an argument that proved that the Free School System reforms, although centralized in structure, conformed with individualist ideology, there was no way to prevent the negative perception.¹⁶

The fear of centralization regarding common schools also raised questions of authority. How much authority would the teacher have over the student? In the North, where the parental authority was given to teachers in the form of *loco parentis* meaning in the absence of the parents, the teacher had full authority. Historian Carl Kaestle noted, “many Southern families, especially where the population was scattered and rural and had homogenous roots, were not so eager to grant the institution [public education] such an important role,” as *loco parentis*.¹⁷

Individualism which specified that one should be responsible for self and self alone, emphasized the argument that parents should educate their own children, and when combining the belief that parents should educate their own children with that of individualism, dovetailed with the rejection of governmental intrusion in the form of taxation for public education. Individualist beliefs compelled most Southerners to oppose tax increases, particularly those used to educate other people’s children. Taxes for

¹⁶ Miss Caroline M. Burrough, “On Public Education in Virginia,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 13, no. 11 (November 1847): 685–89. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*, 92; On the problems of centralized institutions, see James A. Henretta, “Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1978): 3–32; Christopher Clark, “Household Economy, Market Exchange and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800-1860,” *Journal of Social History* 13, no. 2 (1979): 169–89. On economic aims of yeoman see Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*, Updated edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). Harry L. Watson, *Conflict and Collaboration: Yeomen, Slaveholders, and Politics in the Antebellum South* (London). E. Merton Coulter, “A Georgia Educational Movement during the Eighteen Hundred Eighties,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1925): 1–33.

¹⁷ Carl F. Kaestle and Eric Foner, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 133.

popular education not only violated the concept of self-exertion but also triggered the cultural aversion of government overreach. In fact, historian Henry Thompson noted that following the passage of the Free School Act of 1811, the measure was opposed on the part of several who “objected to increased taxation of any kind” and felt education was the individual responsibility.”¹⁸ Janis Greenough provided an example of how taxes were perceived as violating individualism in her study of institutional education in antebellum Tennessee:

If you told him [the backcountry Scotch-Irish Southerner] that it was his duty to give money by law to educate other people’s children, to vote to take other people’s money by law to educate his children, he would have resisted even to the shedding of his blood...Nothing which he and his family could enjoy alone was held in common with other families, neither food, nor clothing, nor schools. No matter what the cost, any school would have been too costly if it meant giving up his self-respect, and that the love and gratitude of his child be turned away from him to either the priest (priestcraft) or the state (statecraft). It was the integrity of parental duty that had to be maintained. The primary responsibility of the parent was to his family and his family alone.¹⁹

The disdain and fear of centralization, uniformity, and external authority had tantalizing consequences. For example, as dissenters continued to use arguments that reiterated the belief that free schools violated individualism through government overreach, much-

¹⁸ Henry Tazewell Thompson, *The Establishment of the Public School System of South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C.: R. L. Bryan, 1927), 6.

¹⁹ Greenough, *Resistance to the Institutionalization of Schooling in the Antebellum Southern Highlands*, 134.

needed reforms, like the adding of a superintendent to organize the schools and the establishment of normal schools in developing a pool of teachers could never occur. As a result, the Free School System of South Carolina remained disorganized and ill-attended; moreover, as the schools continued to suffer, the problems with the system reinforced the established perception that free schools were pauper institutions and general education could not work in South Carolina.

Republicanism in practice:

The corrupt seed and thorns of Pauperism and the Mind of the South

The obstacle of pauperism provides an example as to how popular education failed to favorably align with republican ideology. The failure of general education in South Carolina is grounded in the cultural ideologies that arranged popular education in the mind of South Carolinians just as much as the inner workings of the Free School system.

The Free School Act of 1811 sought to provide education for all children of the state, with the only exception being in the case where preference was entitled to the poor. The act was perverted by those who opposed public education by arguing that the Free School Act of 1811 should serve the poor and indigent only.²⁰ Consequently, their arguments pauperized the Free School Act and corrupted the potential of the Free School System in South Carolina. The ability of dissenters to shape and continue to mold the public mind to perceive free school education as a charitable institution for dependents

²⁰ This is not to say that those who argued the dedication to the poor were not well-meaning but either way it had its effects.

belittled the Free School Act in the mind of South Carolinians while also setting in motion the demise of the Free School System.

Propagating the Free School System as a pauper institution necessarily meant that free schools would have a negative encounter with republicanism and its chief tenets equalitarianism and individualism. An ideology which placed a premium on guarding against ideas and actions that fostered inequality, dependency and the lack of freedom meant that the sending of one's children to a school for the poor, carried the burden of shame, and lowered the worth and public reputation of the family. To prevent the shame attached from attending free schools, many families elected to withhold their children from attending free schools. Edgar Knight noted, "By discriminating between classes in the community, the plan aroused the hostility of the poor people, for whom it was designed, and they were generally unwilling to proclaim themselves as paupers by accepting the scant charity thus extended to them by the state."²¹ Ideas of republicanism convicted parents so that parents refused to commit to such a humiliating act as sending their children to free schools.²² Researcher Virginia Bartel noted, "Most working families were too proud to participate in the 'pauper schools' and kept their children at home."²³ Pauperism attached to free schools not only prevented the lower class from attending

²¹ Edgar Wallace Knight, *Public Education in the South* (Ginn, 1922), 199-205.

²² Bruce W. Eelman, "'An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved': The Struggle for Common Schools in Antebellum Spartanburg, South Carolina," *History of Education Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2004): 250-70.254; J. Isaac Copeland, "The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868" (1957): 134; Thomas R McDaniel, *Public Education in South Carolina: Historical, Political, and Legal Perspectives*. Spartanburg, S.C.: Order from the Bookstore, Converse College, 1984: 9; Edward Magdol and Jon L Wakelyn, *The Southern Common People: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Social History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 57; Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*, 216.

²³ Virginia Bartels, "The History of South Carolina Schools. Edited by Virginia B. Bartels," accessed October 18, 2016, <http://docplayer.net/5527666-The-history-of-south-carolina-schools-edited-by-virginia-b-bartels.html>. 33.

school but the pauperization of the schools also prevented the less wealthy and the more affluent from sending their children to free schools.²⁴

Lucian Minor in 1835 addressed how the stigma of pauperism played on the cultural attitudes of Southerners, which caused them to forego and reject education to protect their honor, albeit haphazardly. He argued that differences between the success of many Northern models of common schools and those in the South were that the North sought to educate all children while the South deliberately concentrated their efforts to educate on the poor. Minor noted, “we thus at once create two causes of failure: first, the slight value which men set upon what costs them nothing...second, the mortification to pride (an honest though mistaken pride) in being singled out as an object of charity.”²⁵ When Minor managed a charity school Minor noted, that many parents would not send their children to school because of run down garments and the lack of food provisions; moreover, when the schools offered to help, parents would reply, “no that was being too dependent.”²⁶

Even if a parent wanted to send their children to a school under the cloak of secrecy to avoid the pauper status, such a plan would have been thwarted by the fact that in some communities, parents had to take the “pauper oath” to qualify to send their children to school. In communities where oaths were not in existence, it was custom to take the names of children in the school as a matter of commissioner reports which often

²⁴ Thomas R. McDaniel, ed., *Public Education in South Carolina*, 9.

²⁵ Lucian Minor, *An Address on Education, as Connected with the Permanence of Our Republican Institutions: Delivered before the Institute of Education of Hampden Sidney College, September 24, 1835* (T.W. White, 1835).

²⁶ Minor.

meant that their pauper status would be revealed. About one in fifty of the school-aged white children in South Carolina was estimated to be in the free schools in 1847.²⁷

The condition of many of the free schools did not help matters. Historian Layton Jordon noted, "Many of the schools were dilapidated and weather-beaten houses in the out of the way places, they were objects of public contempt."²⁸ The presentation of school buildings provided a physical reminder to those who attended and those who refused to attend that free schools were institutions of dishonor and a symbol of inequality.

The Fruit of Pauperism and Republican Ideology: Apathy as Thorns and Thistles

Free schools' conflict with republican ideology produced more than a rejection of the Free School System, it also produced a culture of apathy and indifference toward formal learning and schools for the majority. One of the objectives of popular education was to produce an enhanced intellectual and learning environment in South Carolina. As popular education failed, so too did the potential for the growth of an extensive reading, learning, and intellectual culture. Consequently, a people who came to believe they had no need of education and spent a vast amount of time with unlearned people made it

²⁷ Eelman, Bruce W. 2004. "'An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved': The Struggle for Common Schools in Antebellum Spartanburg, South Carolina". *History of Education Quarterly*. 44, no. 2: 250-270: 254; Copeland, J. Isaac. *The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868*. 1957: 134; McDaniel, Thomas R. *Public Education in South Carolina: Historical, Political, and Legal Perspectives*. Spartanburg, S.C.: Order from the Bookstore, Converse College, 1984: 9; Magdol, Edward, and Jon L. Wakelyn. *The Southern Common People: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Social History*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1980: 57; During the democratic revolution, mostly when the vote was extended to every white male it was recommended that all should received the vote except, criminals and paupers, this indicates the depth of the cultural stigma of pauperism; Ford, Lacy K. *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988: 216.

²⁸ Irving Gershenberg, "Southern Values and Public Education: A Revision," *History of Education Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1970): 415; Copeland, 211.

incredibly difficult for the white majority to find education useful. Living without formal education and maintaining a consciousness that held a disdain for popular education produced habits that resisted and ignored arguments in support of popular education. The apathy of Southerners toward public education minimized their desire, curiosity, and apprehension of the true advantages or disadvantages of formal education. Joseph Caldwell directly speaking on the problem of apathy in North Carolina noted:

A still further difficulty is felt in the indifference unhappily prevalent in many of our people on the subject of education. Vast numbers have grown up into life, have passed into its later years and raised families without it: and probably there are multitudes of whose fore-fathers this is no less to be said...It becomes even an object to believe that the want of education is of little consequence; and as they have made their way through the world without it, better than some who have enjoyed its privileges, they learn to regard it with slight if not with opposition, especially when called to any effort or contribution of funds for securing its advantages to the children.²⁹

Dismissing apathy as a natural indifference to popular education because of republican ideology is a mistake. The lethargic attitude surrounding popular education was a manufactured occurrence by dissenters. By categorizing public education as a pauper institution, it is reasonable to suggest the dissenters knew that such a label would arouse

²⁹ Charles Lee Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790-1840* (Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1908): 551; Magdol and Wakelyn, *The Southern Common People*, 67. William Taylor, "Toward a Definition of Orthodoxy: The Patrician South and the Common Schools," *Harvard Educational Review* 36, no. 4 (1966): 415

hostility, negatively enforce republican instincts, and forced the lower class to label public education anti-republican.

The obstacle and stronghold of apathy and indifference resulting from pauperism are best underscored in the discourse of supporters and commentators who discussed their desires and strategies to overcome the apathy against popular education. In dealing with apathy, supporters provided insight into the culture of indifference that existed. At times, the commentators explained that unless schools fit the habits of the people, conform, or overcome the perception of pauperism, schools would not succeed. However, advocacy of compulsory education demonstrated supporters' struggle to reconfigure the perception of free schools in the imagination of Southerners from optional to compulsory.³⁰

The consistent state of apathy puzzled hopeful reformers of Southern education. The commitment to apathy by the majority of whites caused James Garnett, a politician from Virginia to contend that compulsory attendance was the only way to overturn the cultural attitudes that existed towards popular education among the white majority. However, Garnett knew compulsory attendance would never happen because of the mental maladies affecting Southerners.³¹

Echoing Garnett, Joseph Caldwell, first president of the University of North Carolina, stated in 1848 "provision[s] for general instruction can scarcely be effected, without some compulsory measures regulating the actions of individuals into particular

³⁰ Dissenters of popular education that created a negative perception of the free schools knew that severe consequences that would force the Free School System to its knees.

³¹ Popular Education by James Mercer Garnett, 120.

channels directed upon the object.”³² Caldwell admitted to the fact that to call for compulsory education would conflict with republicanism because, “every such measure [compulsory education] is felt to be an entrenchment upon the indefinite discretion to which we tenaciously adhere.”³³ The prevailing indifference the majority held towards popular education forced supporters like Garnett and Caldwell to call for the extreme measure of compulsory education and ignore republican ideology in hopes of adopting general education. But compulsory education was out of the question. One writer in South Carolina noted that if the people continued to be inspired by apathy and “old Hunkerism” (excessive conservatism, hostility to progress), the persuading of people to take advantage and seek out educational opportunities would be an impossible task.³⁴

Professors of South Carolina College in Columbia Stephen Elliot and James Thornwell also took note of the habits and attitudes of the people. They contended that the attitudes of the people who resisted education derived from logical problems which led them to a careless disposition toward education. The general habits of the people, they noted, prevented any measure of education that might be best for the South. For instance, as they searched for solutions to solve the popular education question they developed the belief that the establishment of boarding schools through state appropriations presented a realistic option for schooling the citizens of South Carolina. But they never published their thoughts because they understood that the lower class on was biased against education, but also because boarding schools intruded on the republican tradition of

³² Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina*, 533.

³³ Coon, 553.

³⁴ “The Common School System,” *Edgefield Advertiser*, November 4, 1846.

families refusing to give up control over their children. They noted that the people suffered from pride which “prevents them from receiving [popular education] that as a bounty, which they cannot procure in any better way.”³⁵ Individualism within the realm of general education generated boundless apathy.

Apathy and indifference, as the fruit of a “misguided” republican ideology, multiplied the obstacles to the Free School System because it continually bound and habitually groomed the perception of the white laboring class and poorer class to have negative attitudes toward popular education.

Part II.

The problem with the class, occupation, and ideas of nature

Although the ruling class had developed a republican ideological defense to popular education, they had to justify their interests without contradicting republicanism. By doing so, they were able to reject general education while promoting education for the ruling class. They did this by supplementing republicanism with other philosophies. Republicanism was the dominant cultural ideology of 19th century South Carolina, but it was not the only ideology working in the minds of South Carolinians. For instance, it was often the opinion and belief of the wealthier class that only those of their class deserved to be educated. This belief was centered on ideas of natural order and notions of fate consolidated by occupational prejudices. For instance, William Harper, social theorist and politician of South Carolina, contended that “the Creator did not intend that every

³⁵ “Report on the Free School by Professor Elliot and Thornwell,” *The Camden Journal*, December 14, 1839.

human being should be highly cultivated...it is better that a part should be fully and highly cultivated and the rest utterly ignorant.”³⁶ Harper, through a belief in the natural order, rejected the idea of educating the majority by invoking the belief that God did not intend for there to be an educated majority. Cultural attitudes were determinants that led to the conclusion that the extent of the educational policy in South Carolina had to be limited to a few, based on the occupation and class status of the individual or family.

The employment of the ideologies of the natural order and notions of fate are best understood through offshoots such as trickle-down education. Trickle-down education was ideology notion that education and educational resources should focus on the wealthier class with the intentions of creating responsibility within the wealthier class to use their knowledge to improve the state. If and when the wealthier class fulfilled their duty to the state, the majority would receive their education directly or indirectly from the progress produced by the wealthier class. Historian Mary Wood Simons explained the essence of trickle-down education. She noted that trickle-down education was an educational policy that “gave to the young of the wealthy the best schooling the times afforded, while it condemned the larger part of the population to a condition of practical illiteracy.”³⁷ The wealthy often had the resources to educate their sons and daughters at schools in the North or internationally, by the hiring of private tutors, or by paying for their children to attend private academies. The wealthy did not have trouble with the education of their children and did not see the need to have much concern for other

³⁶ Pillars of the Republic, 206-207.

³⁷ Mary Wood Simons, “Education in the South,” *American Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 3 (1904): 384; Eelman, “An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved,” 254.

people's children, which agreed with the spirit of individualism. Supporters of trickle-down education deduced that if the staple of educated individuals derived from the wealthier class than all of the educational resources, including funds provided by the state, should aid in the education of the wealthier class.

William MacFarland, writer in the *South Literary Messenger* in 1847 provided an argument for trickle-down education. He explained that a literate class should receive the bulk of educational resources and as repayment this class would elevate the community. MacFarland argued that superior men always had refined society and taught society how to improve, noting, "the voluntary submission of the people to be instructed by their Madisons and Hamiltons was a noble instance of popular homage to the majesty of profound and virtuous minds."³⁸ Speaking hegemonically, he asserted, by developing and assuring a state-sponsored literate class, the community could guarantee a reasonable degree of an educated majority or at least a sound public opinion because the literate class would guide the popular mind into the right courses of actions.³⁹ He noted that most men were unaware of the power of mind over matter, and are most concerned with matter over material creation; the literary class had had much control over the opinions and tastes of the age. He noted, "it is the influence of this class which determines the direction of the common mind, not that alone, but the force and strength of the current...this class...it is

³⁸ William H. MacFarland, "The Importance of a Literary Class," *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 13, no. 9 (September 1847): 572. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders' World View* (American Academy of Religion, 1987), 211-213. Fox-Genovese noted that slaveholders believed the social order had to be divinely sanctioned, noted, "at the core of their thought lay a belief of hierarchy, particularism, and the necessarily unequal interdependence of society's members." This belief was also widespread, she noted, "however self-serving the slaveholders' vision of the particulars of divine sanction, its general claims was broad acceptance among the propertied by a largely non-slaveholding majority of white Southerners."

³⁹ Ibid, 572.

influential to purify or to demoralize; to begat a taste and faculty for what is true, permanent sound, or what is frivolous, effeminate, gross.”⁴⁰ MacFarland articulated the nature of trickle- down education and the use of the monopoly of knowledge as a key to how the ruling class governed the majority.. [unclear] The literate class mentioned by MacFarland already existed, and his words were more of a declaration of fact than an aspiration. In essence, the author called a for a continuation of trickle-down education, which allowed the ruling class to maintain control over the state’s culture by classifying and dictating what was holy or unholy. Historian Clement Eaton warned future historians to keep in mind that the ruling class dominated not by law or courts but by “disapproval and ostracism.”⁴¹ MacFarland indirectly confessed that the ruling class held authority over the popular mind regarding popular education because they wielded power to value and devalue popular education before the popular mind had the chance to judge the matter and reach its own consensus. For instance, South Carolina leaders judged the Free School Act as a poor law and the Free School System as a pauper institution before the majority decided for itself if it aided or harmed their life chances. The majority were goose-stepped into accepting the verdict of the upper class; and in the case of the Free School System, once the free schools were dedicated to the poor, the schools were rejected by the majority.⁴²

⁴⁰ MacFarland., 573.

⁴¹ Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*, Revised & Enlarged edition (Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 41-88.

⁴² The majority were goose-stepped into accepting the verdict of the upper class; and in the case of the Free School System, once the free schools were dedicated to the poor, the school were rejected by the majority.

Echoing MacFarland, Caroline Burrough, writer in the *Southern Literary Messenger* also articulated the cultural attitudes and philosophies of trickle-down education. She explained, “light should be set on high places that it may dispel the darkness that surround us.”⁴³ For Burrough, public schools were a waste of resources, which could have gone to better use by adding to the educational resources of those more “fitted” to learn. To hide her anti-republican beliefs, Burrough also used the belief in the natural order to get around the republican principle of equality. The use of natural order rhetoric was more acceptable than a direct speech in favor of inequality because it did not directly contradict the ideal in support of the equality of men because it presupposed that differences between men were ordained, not by man, but by God (an unchallenged higher power, which overruled the opinions of men). For instance, Burrough noted, “God made the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night, and this principle of inequality was through the whole order of creation, and all attempts to subvert it, must end, as they always have done, in the manifest injury of all parties.”⁴⁴ Burrough believed popular education or any institution to uplift the masses of whites as a futile mission that struggled against the natural order. The belief that God's natural order prohibited popular education not only aided in the belief that the lack of popular education upheld republican ideology but that trickle-down education for the wealthier class aligned with God's will.

⁴³ Burrough, “On Public Education in Virginia.” 685.

⁴⁴ Burrough, 686. Burrough is not against education but believes that to begin an educational culture, the upper class must not only be its advocates but diffuse education by example. Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*, (LSU, Baton Rouge, 1976), 39. Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 39.

Thomson Edward, writer in the *Southern Quarterly Review*, also believed education should remain with the ruling class and that ideas of equality halted progress. Edward suggested, “if then it is an inevitable feature of social existence, which a large portion of the race must be hewers of wood and carriers of water...it becomes a serious question, whether political freedom adds anything to the happiness of the social slave; or on the contrary, it is not a mockery of his fate and a bitter aggravation of this degradation of his position.”⁴⁵ Edward contended it was best to avoid popular education altogether. Thinking education did more harm than good, Edward argued that popular education had adverse effects on the majority because education added misery to the lives of the lower class by forcing them to recognize their true place in society, which would result in mental instability.⁴⁶ Austin Hagerman noted, “the rich and the poor are mutually necessary to each other’s well-being. The happiness of each depends upon his being in his true position.”⁴⁷ Education of the masses frustrated that natural order and aggravated the mind of the poor classes, by making bare their true and restricted position. Hagerman noted, “Let the poor lad, if he will, nobly strive to elevate himself by the labors of his mind; but you can never urge him to make the efforts which are necessary to the acquisition of knowledge if he knows that, after he has opened the portals of science, he shall be compelled to return to the habits and occupations of poverty. We believe, indeed,

⁴⁵ Thomson Rev. Edward, “Religious Instruction of Slaves,” *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 14, no. 27 (n.d.): 170–83.171-172.

⁴⁶ Such beliefs parallel the bible in protecting the poor from their misery, Proverbs 31:7 state “Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.” Unknown, *Holy Bible: King James Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1980). Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, First Edition (Washington, D.C. : Lanham, MD: Regnery Books, 1989), 98-111.

⁴⁷ Austin Q. Hagerman, “Free School System in South Carolina,” *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 16, no. 31 (October 1849): 36.

that there is nothing in refined education which unfits a man for activity, but there is unquestionably a sense of incongruousness in the position of him who, after having sipped at the fountain of Castalia, finds himself reduced to the necessity of becoming a daily laborer for his daily bread.”⁴⁸ The cultural attitudes of the dissenting elite led to and maintained the resistance to popular education as they were under the opinion that withholding knowledge was necessary to preserve the social order. In the opinion of Burrough and Hagerman, a knowledgeable laboring class presented a threat to the existing order.

The use of biblical rhetoric by Burrough and Edward is important because it was another way to view the intellectual domination by the ruling class and how they avoided eliciting or evoking a knee-jerk reaction against republican beliefs, which would have countered any idea or action that promoted inequality. The use of religion to argue against popular education was particularly effective in allowing unequal notions about whites to exist in the Southern white mind. As Richard Weaver noted, for the most part, Southerners understood religion as “unquestioned and unquestionable supports of the general settlement under which men live...what he recognized was the acknowledgment, the submissiveness of the will, and that respect for order, natural and institutional, which is piety.”⁴⁹ Moreover, allowance for inequality was a necessary “contradiction” in the cultural attitudes of the Southern mind because inequality was a necessary and a required feature of the Southern society where paternalism, patriarchy, and slavery dominated.

⁴⁸ Austin Q. Hagerman, “Free School System in South Carolina,” 36.

⁴⁹ Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 364.

The wealthy class utilized and infused these same beliefs into the educational policy of the state to deny general education.

Understanding how the wealthier class responded to an educated person is critical to contextualizing why dissenters rejected popular education, why dissenters believed education should remain with the few, and how those who denied popular education believed popular education would destabilize society. The ruling class, truly all classes, gave a level of respect to the educated because education represented a kind of intellectual independence which was perceived as a republican achievement. Nevertheless, intellectual republicanism did not trump material republicanism, which all classes sought to attain above all else. Nonetheless, having attained education was a mark of distinction. Historian Elizabeth Pryor explained, “The educational philosophy of the planter class was derived from earlier English theories of learning, which viewed education both as a necessity for leading a godly life and as a method of enhancing prestige and assuring worldly power.”⁵⁰ Those who possessed education, even among the elite, increased their status above their peers.

The power and respect commanded by education was represented in the planters’ class distinguishable treatment between hired tutors and overseers. Pryor noted an important point: “Educational equality or superiority thus enabled the tutor to rise above an often inferior social background to be admired and respected.”⁵¹ While the hired tutor was more socially acceptable and generally received respect from planters for achieving

⁵⁰ Pryor, 363-372.

⁵¹ Pryor, 373.

some level of education and a form of mental independence, the overseers, on the other hand, although paid the same as a hired tutor were “treated with suspicion, his life and movements circumscribed and was regarded by his employer as merely a hireling ‘to be kept at a distance.’”⁵² Pryor showed how education had equalizing effects. Thus, popular education threatened the power and authority of the wealthier class by wielding the mental power to more readily think beyond the existing order.⁵³

The notice of occupational prejudices

Arguments of dissent towards popular education that utilized notions of natural order and fate were used to discriminate against the lower classes. Biases against the lower classes were not merely mental imaginations and cultural attitudes without cause, but these notions were indicative of a more significant problem. Occupational prejudice, trickle-down education, and the devaluing of popular education convinced the Southern majority to agree with the devaluing of general education and was reflective of the ruling class’ silent class war against the lower class, and the occupational prejudice allowed this war to become an observable fact expressed by a few.

The educational embargo imposed on the laboring class and “non-specialty” occupations like that of yeoman farmers led one commentator to note that farmers were being discriminated against and farmers had to reject the educational status quo and elevate themselves. The author noted, “let agriculturalists educate their children thoroughly, regardless of any such partial, unfair, and unjust consideration. As

⁵² Ibid, 375

⁵³ Ibid, 374.

agriculturalists, let them educate their children for agriculturalists. Let them not give bread to one and stones and serpents to the other. Let them bear in mind that education adorns and improves the cultivator of the soil as much, as it does the lawyer, the doctor or the divine. It is a false notion and unworthy of the citizens of a free republic, that education was not necessary to the cultivator of the soil.”⁵⁴ The author called for farmers to pursue education to challenge the discriminating principles of those who controlled the resources of the state and advised farmers to change their own cultural attitudes toward popular education. The author contended that farmers had fallen for the cultural ideologies and principles of their leaders, which convinced them that education was not needed for their profession had left farmers at a great disadvantage.

Another commentator noted that there was an obvious prejudice against those who cultivated the soil, and many have pushed and convinced farmers, “due to their station,” to be against book learning or the need to be educated. However, the author noted, “it is necessary that a farmer should be educated, as it is for any other citizen of our country. There is no science or art so generally neglected, as the science or art of Agriculture; and this is owing chiefly, to a want of proper intellectual culture.”⁵⁵

Boldly and radically, one author called for farmers to educate themselves so that they can become the rulers rather than being ruled by the learned professions. The author noted, “every occupation in the country seems to be bountifully provided for save that of the farmer, and surely no one is to blame for this but yourselves; for if you choose, you

⁵⁴ “Farmers and Their Children,” *The Banner*, June 1846.

⁵⁵ “The Farmer,” *The Camden Journal*, May 4, 1842.

need only to speak to your servants, and your rulers and reform might be had at once. Ponder these things well, then, in the legislature to assemble this winter speak out and demand equal benefits with the most favored of the other professions.”⁵⁶ He noted that farmers could demand a place on an equal platform with more respected professions because they out-numbered any other profession some three and half times over and with the power of numbers could stamp out the prejudices that they willingly let hold them back from knowledge.

With overwhelming numbers, the author noted that farmers, if they were educated, could potentially control every aspect of government and become the new guides of public opinion. However, because they lacked education and failed to perceive the power of education, they also lacked the mind to perceive their own power and fight against societal discrimination. Attempting to press the farming class to rethink their perception of education, the author provided an example of educational advantages. The intellectual strength of the learned profession and upper classes had allowed 65,255 learned professions (educated people) to rule over 3,751,000 farmers.⁵⁷ The author urged farmers to challenge, overturn, and discard their cultural attitudes towards popular education to undo occupational prejudices that walled up the way for their path to education and accurate perception of their importance to society.

The upper-class ideas of class, occupations, and nature stifled popular education and revealed the desire to keep education away from the white majority. Although it is

⁵⁶ “The Importance of Educating the Farmer,” *The Camden Journal*, February 16, 1848.

⁵⁷ “The Importance of Educating the Farmer.”

not conspicuous, the class warfare among whites is displayed in the discourse on popular education. Popular education, particularly education that sought to bring about self-realization and actualization of the lower class, as many supporters promoted, had within it the seeds of revolution. Thus, dissenters and defenders of the status quo consciously or unconsciously had to reject popular education.⁵⁸ The next section explains how the dissenters gained a major advantage in the struggle over popular education and took a major step in thwarting popular education in South Carolina by ensuring the mind of South Carolinians negatively perceived the Free School Act and Free School System

⁵⁸ William Taylor, "Toward a Definition of Orthodoxy: The Patrician South and the Common Schools," *Harvard Educational Review* 36, no. 4 (1966): 412–26, 416–417; David Brown, "A Vagabond's Tale: Poor Whites Herrenvolk Democracy, and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South," *Journal of Southern History* 79, no. 4 (November 2013): 840. David Brown noted, "The herrenvolk thesis contends that white Southern men enjoyed equality on the basis of their skin color. In reality, the potency of whiteness was significantly diminished for some poor whites by the eve of the American Civil War. Power was vigorously contested in the Old South, and few things were given away."

Chapter 2

The Troubles of Popular Education

The passing of the Free School Act was a major step towards popular education, but it was also a continuation of a silent war over the control of knowledge. This chapter partly explains how dissenters of popular education mobilized and weaponized Southern culture to prevent the proper understanding of the Free School Act and ensure the Free School System had little to no effect on South Carolina's society. This struggle was between those who rejected popular education and desired to keep knowledge and formal education within the grasp of a wealthy minority and those who envisioned popular education as a societal necessity for all citizens regardless of status. In other words, the former group believed general education was a threat to the continuity of the status quo while the latter group believed general education was essential for individuals and society well-being. What is not always clear are the lines of demarcation of friends or foes.

For example, The Free School Act of 1811 encountered hostility not long after being passed. During the War of 1812, there were calls to abandon the Free School Act. Richard Johnson, a representative from Edgefield, introduced a bill to repeal the Free School Act on December 1, 1812; however, "the schools were saved by a margin of seventeen votes, the count being forty-five to sixty-two."¹ Johnson failed in a second

¹ J. Isaac Copeland, "The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868" (1957): 143.

attempt to repeal the Free School Act in 1813. Johnson's actions to repeal the Free School Act may have been an attempt to create a new act because he saw the future problems of the Free School System. In its inaugural years, free schools made headway in larger and often more wealthier towns; however, among the few schools that came into existence most were relegated to the "poor." In addition, districts often used free school funds to pay the tuition of poorer children at private schools, which would stifle public school expansion. Johnson may have viewed the potential course of the system unacceptable, as he may have sought to eradicate the Free School Act before it grew into something that could not be easily removed or reformed.²

Avoiding the temptation to judge Johnson's repeal as a call for the rejection of popular education allows for open assessment of the discourse of popular education. For example, William Crafts, Jr., a representative of St. Philip's and St. Michael, responded to Johnson's repeal: "If we do abolish Free-Schools, let the eagle be removed from over your head, Mr. Speaker. It is the image of a bird that lives upon light. It cannot endure darkness. Either shroud it in mourning or send it away."³ Crafts represented low country districts and the low country often benefited most from the free school fund. Although Craft's words are in defense of the system, other points of history may prove that Craft was not for general education but instead, he sought to maintain the Free School Act because the free school fund helped his district and his constituents gain resources for

² David Duncan Wallace, *The History of South Carolina* (American historical society, Incorporated, 1934), 460; Henry Tazewell Thompson, *The Establishment of the Public School System of South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C.: R. L. Bryan, 1927), 6; Colyer Meriwether and Edward McCrady, *History of Higher Education in South Carolina* (Washington, Govt. print. off., 1889), 113-114.

³ Copeland, "The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868," 143. Thompson, *The Establishment of the Public-School System of South Carolina*, 6.

education. The words of commentators, dissenters, or supporters had to be examined thoroughly and placed within the best possible context to understand this struggle over knowledge and access to education.

Free School Act Incapacitated and the Free School System Sabotage

Historian Bruce Eelman stated, “Southern initiatives in common schooling occurred in fits and starts and did not achieve great success prior to the Civil War.”⁴ Why is that? What does it mean that popular education struggled to develop in the South, particularly South Carolina? South Carolina is widely known for grossly neglecting popular education. However, how can we make sense of the fact that South Carolina has one of the most unfortunate reputations for neglecting popular education but was one of the earliest of the old Southern states to pass legislation in support of popular education? What can be learned from an overview and investigation of the discourse of the Free School Act of 1811? and Despite the existence of a Free School Act and the existence of a Free School System, why did the system fail or struggle?

Why would South Carolina leaders pass a Free School Act on the basis of creating a system of popular education and haphazardly carry the system out, which gained South Carolina a reputation for being one of the most neglectful states in matters of popular education? A short explanation of the goal of the Free School Act and the subsequent interpretations of the Free School Act, along with a detailed inspection on the the flaws and obstacles of the Free School System, will provide a major reason why the debacled

⁴ Bruce W. Eelman, “An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved’: The Struggle for Common Schools in Antebellum Spartanburg, South Carolina,” *History of Education Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2004): 252.

educational policy for popular education in South Carolina was not necessarily the result of unforeseen and natural circumstances, but instead it was deliberate course of action. The failure of popular education in South Carolina was the result of dissenters to popular education successfully perverting the Free School Act and molding the failures of free schools to negatively correspond with the cultural attitudes of the lower class would cause them to revile popular education. The failure of the Free School System in South Carolina was an act of sabotage, the right prediction of dissenters that making free schools antirepublican would aid in the lower class rejecting the Free School System.

Crucial to the story of sabotage is understanding how the interpretation of the Free School Act became corrupted and how the obstacles and failures of the Free School System doomed free schools to failure and how the failure of the schools dovetailed with the cultural instincts of the Southerners, which led them to believe that popular education was anti-republican, undesirable, and impossible to establish in South, especially in South Carolina. The subsequent overview follows the entire history of the Free School Movement, including the goals and plan of the Free School Act of 1811, the provision of the Free School Act, the obstacles of the Free School System, the lack of reform and neglect of the Free School System and how the failures of the Free Schools System interacted with cultural attitudes of South Carolinians, creating a culture of dissent.⁵

⁵ South Carolina Department of Agriculture, *South Carolina: Resources and Population. Institutions and Industries* (Walker, Evans & Cogswell, printers, 1883), 453.

The 1811 Act as a building block or a springboard

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, South Carolinians began to take steps toward building intellectual infrastructure in which the Free School Act of 1811 was slated to be a major part. The passing of a general education law in South Carolina was not a whimsical decision. The development of the Free School Act was part of a broader discussion about education in South Carolina. Educational commentator William Johnson reported that in 1789 South Carolinians on a revolutionary high dedicated themselves to the promotion of education. Part of the promotion of popular education stemmed from the need to calm class tensions, as well as socialize the younger generation toward loyalty and patriotism of the new republic. Popular education became a serious goal for South Carolina leaders, which Johnson explained resulted in a two-part plan to develop an educational infrastructure. Johnson noted, “the plan then proposed, was, to have an established at the seat of government, with a superintending power over academies established in each district courthouse, and to vest in the trustees of those Academies a similar power over subordinate schools to be dispersed over the state with a view to accommodate the population of several counties of parishes.”⁶ Johnson did not mention the full details of the plan. However, he did inform his readers that the plan was highly centralized and that the plan was to begin with the establishment of South Carolina College in 1801 (at the seat of government in Columbia, South Carolina) and the Free

⁶ Lowell Harrison, “South Carolina’s Educational System in 1822,” *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 51, no. 1 (1950): 1–9.

School Act of 1811 was to usher in the second part of the plan, and it was in the second portion where the plan failed to materialize fully.⁷

Granted, the Free School Act only allotted an expenditure of \$37,000. It would seem unreasonable to consider \$37,000 a proper foundation for the popular education of an entire state and the framers of the law operated on that fact. The framers of the law did not intend on the Free School Act to remain the same forever. The framers created a flexible law with the intention to allow future legislation to build upon it.⁸ For instance, the Free School Act made it clear that three hundred dollars was the base amount paid out of the State Treasury for each school “until other sufficient funds may by law be provided.”⁹

The creators of the law did not have much data or research on the educational condition of the state beyond the fact that educational opportunities for the majority were few. Although the law reflected the state’s lack of insight on the state’s education condition, it also indicated a desire to act on what they saw as oversight. In other words, the framers intended the 1811 law to be a firm footing, while at the same time, a springboard for greater commitment and expansion for educational opportunities opened to the entire white population. The 1811 act was to be the first step among many in the attempt to educate all white children of the state. If the framers erred, they erred in the belief and assumption that South Carolina’s antebellum leaders would see the need for

⁷ Charles William Dabney, *Universal Education in the South* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1936): 4.

⁸ Yates Snowden and Harry Gardner Cutler, *History of South Carolina* (Lewis Publishing Company, 1920), 532.

⁹ South Carolina, *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina: Containing the Acts from 1786, Exclusive, to 1814, Inclusive, Arranged Chronologically*. Id., 1839. xxxii, 818 (A.S. Johnston, 1839): 639.

popular education and grow in its commitment to popular education sooner rather than never.

Misinterpretation of a clause and the poor question

The failure of popular education in South Carolina begins with understanding the interplay between cultural attitudes, and the perversion and misinterpretation of the Free School Act of 1811. If the goal of free school legislation was to educate the white majority, what did the Free School Act of 1811 say concerning the education of the majority? What were the implications of the law? Was the Free School Act of 1811 genuinely democratic and social in its intentions? The intent of educating as many of the white majority as possible is an obvious conclusion of a cursory reading of the act. Under the section ‘who may go to said schools’ the law explained who would have had the opportunity to be educated, it read:

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that every citizen of this state shall be entitled to send his or her child or children, ward or wards, to any free school in the district where he or she may reside, free from any expense whatsoever on account of tuition; and where more children shall apply for admission at any one school than can be conveniently educated therein, a preference shall always be given to poor orphans and the children of indigent and necessitous parents.¹⁰

¹⁰ Carolina, *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 639; George C. Rogers, *The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina*, 1st edition (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1970), 213.

The law stated all children should have the opportunity to be educated. The act had an inclusive and democratic tone that allowed any and everyone to be educated, regardless of class or gender. The only restriction or reservation with the law, which served as a clause of fairness and justice to ensure that the less wealthy, who desired education but were unable to afford education by other means, should be given precedence in the case of capacity issues. Ironically, the line which served as a principle of justice became the source of considerable confusion and became a principal reason for the corruption of the Free School Act and the failure of the Free School System.

Many commentators and many against popular education interpreted the clause that gave preference to the poor as an opening to argue that the free schools should exist only for indigent and orphan children. They interpreted the entire law as an act of welfare for the poor. The consistent perception that the aim of free schools should benefit the poor and only the poor corrupted the intent and marred the reception of the Free School Act of 1811 and the subsequent Free School System. For example, Mrs. J.E.

M'Conaughy, writing in the *Southern Quarterly Review* in 1844, provides an example of how the Free School System was understood to be an system for the poor. In discussing common schools, she noted how that the free schools existed to serve orphans, poor, and illiterate parents as its "chief objects."¹¹ The notion that the Free School Act and the Free School System was a law and system of benevolence effectively diminished the importance and aims of the Free School Act and implanted within the Free School

¹¹ "System of Common Schools," *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 6, no. 12 (October 1844): 453–82.

System a programmatic virus that prevented the system from benefitting the white majority.¹²

Distorted cultural attitudes, assumptions, and prejudices by ruling class dissenters contorted the Free School Act into an act of charity. This fact is displayed in how leaders interpreted the line which gave preference to the poor in the case of capacity issues. The obsession and concentration on the poor question intentionally drew attention away from the greater intent of the law. The Free School Act gave preference to the poor, but who was poor? What did poor mean? Poor, a highly charged cultural and emotional word to use in any place of the Union in the early nineteenth century where the mentality of republicanism held a prominent vocation in the lives of all Americans, would have catastrophic results on the success of the system. Historians have had a tough time determining the “poor” of the South because no self-respecting Southerner in the antebellum period would admit to poverty despite material circumstances.

So why did the creators of the act use the word “poor?” The word “poor” used in the Free School Act was purposely vague; nonetheless, the meaning of poor was explained in the context of the clause. When the writers of the legislation used the word poor, it can be argued that they meant those with a high degree of poverty. By using descriptive language such as poor-orphans, children of the indigent and necessitous parents, the framers sought to measure the conditions of poverty as a method to render judgment when and if the degree of poverty would be necessary to judge between poor

¹² Thomas H. Pope, *The History of Newberry County, South Carolina: 1749-1860* (University of South Carolina Press, 1973): 218; *Common Schools. Remarks on the School Law of the Last Session of the Legislature: And Information Concerning the Common Schools of Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, &c. &c* (gratuitous distribution., 1826), 4.

individuals in the case of school capacity issues. Poor children of orphan status had higher priority over poor children of indignant status. Framers anticipated a growing school attendance. Thus, if indignant children filled a school, space had to be made for the child of orphaned status. However, the framers also made it clear that such judgments on the poor should be reserved and utilized as a consequence of limited space due to overcrowding but for no other purposes. The framers noted that every citizen should be entitled to an education, including the rich, middling sort, and poor. The act would exclude slaves because they were forbidden to learn, and free blacks, as their status was never legally defined until the Dred Scott case. Either way, free blacks could not partake in free schools.

The Free School Act of 1811 was intended to be classless, except in the event where those who could attain education by other means or those with more fortunate circumstances had to yield their seat(s) to those who had less of an opportunity to gain an education by other means. The justice that the creators sought to place within the law became the blight of the law. Leaders who disagreed with popular education subverted the intent of the Free School Act by claiming the clause the judge between the poor listed the objective of the law, which led to the pauperizing of the Free School System and virtually divorcing the act and system from its democratic intent and twisting the law into a law for the poor.

What is the big deal of designating the Free School System as a system designed for the poor?

Despite the plan to educate every citizen in the state of South Carolina, rich and poor alike, the orientation of the Free School Act to educate the pauper and indigent only poisoned the Free School System.¹³ Historians noticed the perversion of the Free School Act and the consequences to the Free School System. Historian David Wallace noted, “The preference ordered for the poor and orphans damned the system, thus predestined to become ‘pauper schools’ instead of a public-school system for all the people.”¹⁴ The fall-out of the corruption of the Free School Act unto the Free School System resulted in much confusion and the confusion on the objectives of the Free School System served as an agent of corrosion against the intent of the framers who sought to diffuse education as widely and to as many white citizens as possible.

Shifting the intent of the law and the plan to establish and grow a centralized system of schools that allotted all classes the opportunity to learn changed the entire focus and the course of the law from majority benefit to the benefit of specialized section of the population. A continued focus and acceptance of the free school law by leaders as a law that would provide an educational opportunity for the poor only convinced leaders that the Free School System was also for the poor. Under the contrived perception that the school law and system was for the poor only, it was repeatedly argued there was little need to expand and establish an efficient Free School System.

¹³ May Wood Simons, “Education in the South,” *American Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 3 (1904): 384.

¹⁴ Wallace, *The History of South Carolina*, 460. *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*, 1845.

Historian Furman Thomason also highlighted the overwhelming but subtle change in aim and nature of the act and its effects on the system. He explained how the free school fund was distributed to the poor as the chief beneficiary. He found that the funds were allocated not for establishing education for the majority but distributed with the distinct focus on educating the poor and “limited to the needy.”¹⁵ The leaders believed, he noted, “If the poor child be improved and enlightened ‘a general good is done, for while the poor man is made more virtuous, the rich man is made more secure.”¹⁶ No longer was the education of all children the objective, and this had severe consequences for the prospect of delivering educational opportunities to the white majority.

Moreover, and more significantly, diminishing the Free School Act to a law for the poor only set up a culture for free schools that directly conflicted with republicanism. Many families rejected popular education on the basis that they would be counted among the poor for attending free schools. The cultural attitudes of South Carolinians could not accept and did not accept free schools on the principle that the schools would categorize and broadcast persons and families as poor, making that person dishonorable dependent and thus unequal to other whites.¹⁷

For example, a Virginia author, who explored the Free School System of Virginia and South Carolina and the consequences of making the poor the chief beneficiaries of free school laws, discussed how common schools rub negatively against republicanism.

¹⁵ John Furman Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina* (State Company, 1925): 140. “Social Divisions in Antebellum North Carolina - North Carolina Digital History,” accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-antebellum/5601>.

¹⁶ John Furman Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina* (State Company, 1925):140

¹⁷ Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, 40.

The author noted, “The capital error of her system appears to consist in attempting to provide for the education of poor children only, instead of adopting a broad and comprehensive system which shall embrace in its liberal scope every class of the community...this mode of admitting the children of the poor, exposes them to the mortification of being considered and treated as an inferior cast.”¹⁸ Pauperizing free schools was an effective tactic to denounce general education without directly speaking against the education of the white majority.¹⁹

The way cultural attitudes interplay with the Free School Act and Free School System were not advantageous to the white majority. In fact, the pauperization of the Free School Act underscores the fact that there was never any intention to establish an educational system for the majority, and culture played a major role in preventing the white majority from having greater expectations from the Free School System. In addition, the negativity drawn to popular education enabled dissenters to foster and support negative sentiments to sabotage the Free School System. More of this fact is revealed in a brief investigation of how the Free School System operated and the obstacles that affected the progress of the system. What is concluded about the Free School System as a gateway to popular education in South Carolina will be the same as what historian E. Merton Coulter found in his investigation of popular education in Georgia, where he argued that “education in the state was a farce-it was, indeed, worse than a farce; it was a mean trick played upon the ignorant masses, for as a uniform system

¹⁸ *Common Schools. Remarks on the School Law of the Last Session of the Legislature.*

it was non-existent.”²⁰ Like in Georgia, there was never any genuine intention of educating the white majority in South Carolina. What is more, the consistent presence of a failing system of free schools acted as great deterrent to popular education and the diffusion of knowledge.²¹

Part II.

The Obstacles of the Free School System

The Problem with Commissioners:

Several problems hindered the growth of the Free School System. Making mention of a few of the obstacles the Free Schools System faced will help to contextualize the effects of pauperizing the Free School Act; in addition, learning the obstacles of the system in concert with the failure to improve or reform the Free School System will manifest points of resistance to the educating the majority. Each unreformed obstacle not only behaves as an denouncement to popular education but also functions as an act of resistance, which helped to control the reception of popular education in the popular mind.

The Free School Act of 1811 endowed commissioners with immense power and responsibility. According to the law of 1811, each district had to appoint (according to population and wealth) at least three (unpaid) commissioners but could not have any more than thirteen. They served three-year terms, appointed by the legislature. Thus, the

²⁰ Coulter, 4

²¹ Thompson, *The Establishment of the Public School System of South Carolina*. James Moultrie, *An Eulogium on Stephen Elliott*, 1830, 21.

responsibility and authority over the Free School System resided with the legislature and commissioners. The commissioners had power to: “determine the situation of the schools in each district, to appoint masters for each school, and to remove them at pleasure, to arrange the system of instruction until some general system be organized, to decide on the admission of scholars, and the preference to be given in all cases of doubt or difficulty, and to superintend generally the management of schools in their respective districts, and shall have power to draw on the comptroller for the sums appropriated for the schools in their respective districts.”²² The operation of the Free School System gave enormous power and placed enormous weight upon these commissioners; in fact, the entire system rested on their shoulders. The problems and the failures of the commissioners directly stemmed from inexperience and their endowed power. It can be argued that the Free School Act did not do enough to support the commissioners, nor did it explain the details of their duties. Nonetheless, commissioners often failed to do the basic and essential duties of collecting information and reporting their findings to the legislature.

One of the most significant problems that plagued the Free School System was the lack of information concerning the condition of system and Commissioner reports, which were due annually was intended to help the legislature ascertain the needs and wants of the free schools and provide the proper resources to help the system prosper. However, the task of obtaining statements from commissioners was a hassle and oftentimes a failure. Many of the reports of the commissioners were either incomplete or

²² Carolina, *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*: 639.

never made it to the legislature's educational committees. The lack of information proved extremely challenging. Without comprehensive reports, it was impossible to make adequate or accurate judgments on the progress, problems, needs or desires of Free School System. Historian Edgar Knight noted, "these officers [commissioners] were frequently careless and indifferent, and the penalties prescribed were rarely imposed."²³

The persistence of commissioners' negligence became such a problem that the legislature created laws to force commissioners to complete their reports. As early as 1822 a penalty of "\$50.00 and removal from office was imposed upon commissioners who failed to make reports to the Legislature..."²⁴ The 1822 penalty slightly assisted in the collection of reports, but more penalties were added in 1835 when Judge Edward Frost. However, the steps taking in 1835 made little difference. Commissioners were unpaid, and the new law did not add compensation nor did it create an office to enforce the penalty and oversee commissioners and, as a result, the 1835 act was "comparatively inoperative."²⁵

The lack and absence of information concerning the status and condition of the Free School System crippled the system in a myriad of ways. The commissioners' neglect of submitting reports persisted over decades and the inability as well as the indifference of the legislature to ascertain the condition of the free schools not only plagued the Free School System but helped to create much apathy toward the system. The problem with

²³Edgar W. Knight, "An Early Educational Survey in South Carolina," *The High School Journal* 32, no. 1 (1949): 131.

²⁴ Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina* (State Company: South Carolina, 1925): 132.

²⁵ Robert Francis Withers Allston, *Report on the Free School System in South-Carolina* (Miller & Browne, 1847), 7, When penalties were enforced commissioners often resigned.

commissioners was a part of a culture of no accountability that persisted throughout the antebellum period.²⁶

Problem with appropriating funds

The consistent complaint of unequal distribution of free school funds served as another obstacle preventing the growth and service of the Free School System. Additionally, there seems to be a link between the unequal distribution of funds and intrastate differences. In antebellum South Carolina, the upcountry was characterized as a section the held some wealth but was inhabited by lower-class whites (plain folk) while the low country was characterized by aristocratic wealthy planters. Historians Harry L. Watson and Lacy Ford pointed out these two sections often conflicted over “suffrage rights and sectional representation in the legislatures...banking, internal improvements, common schools, and state taxation....”²⁷ Few have pointed out, how intrastate conflict manifest in the distribution of free school fund appropriation and sectional inequalities.²⁸

As outlined in the Free School Act of 1811, the number of schools designated for each district was predicated by the number of representatives. Representatives were decided according to taxation and population, a format borrowed from the federal census. Determining the creation of a school as well as school appropriations was based on the

²⁶ Copeland, “The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868.”, Ph.D, University of North Carolina: 135.

²⁷ Harry L Watson, *Conflict and Collaboration: Yeomen, Slaveholders, and Politics in the Antebellum South*, *Social History* 10, no. 3 (1985): 275; W. J Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1941): 99.

²⁸ Harry L Watson, “The Man with the Dirty Black Beard: Race, Class, and Schools in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 32, no. 1 (2012): 1–26. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (Simon and Schuster, 1999). Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 164-165. On state expenditure and intrastate conflict see Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (Oxford Press, 1991), 16-17.

federal census and it had an inherent problem. The taxation and population ratio by federal count included the enslaved population, which entitled slaveholding and wealthier districts to more schools and funding.²⁹

Robert Y. Hayne of Charleston explained how the low country, particularly Charleston, capitalized on free school fund distribution. He noted, “From population alone (richer districts) be entitled only to about nine representatives (nine schools), but our wealth would entitle us to a greater number. The Combined ratio gives us sixteen representatives, and consequently sixteen schools, of which we are entitled to three hundred dollars per annum out of the treasury.”³⁰ The imbalance caught the attention of historian William Sellers. Discussing the lopsided appropriation between districts outside of wealthy districts, he noted, “how much of this \$37,000 appropriated for free schools since 1814 was apportioned to Marion District is unknown, as no permanent record thereof seems to have been kept by the Commissioners. If any was kept, it is inaccessible-it was, however, a mere pittance, and did but little good. The four counties-Beaufort, Colleton, Charleston, and Georgetown-having most of the parishes within their borders, and having the greater representation in the legislature, hence they shared most of the appropriation, while the rest of the state got but little of it, and were little benefitted by it.”³¹

²⁹ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, 33; Fletcher Melvin Green, *Constitutional Development in the South Atlantic States, 1776-1860: A Study in the Evolution of Democracy* (Da Capo Press, 1971), 168-170.)

³⁰ Harrison, “South Carolina’s Educational System in 1822.”

³¹ W. W. (William W.) Sellers, *A History of Marion County, South Carolina, from Its Earliest Times to the Present, 1901* (Columbia : R.L. Bryan Co., 1902).

The advantage richer districts gained meant that locations the free school funds were most needed (whiter and less wealthy districts) received less than what necessity warranted. Under the free school distribution statute, there was a favoring towards populated and wealthy districts, but if taken the law with more liberality, the plan was to ensure education in places where free education was more a necessity, not to say for the poor but where the bulk of the white population resided. This unfairness of distribution was one of the major reasons many non-slaveholding whites held contempt for the Free School System. The unequal distribution did not go undiscovered, and some like Thomas Bennet Jr. commented on the matter, he noted:

Yet recurring to the immense sums annually appropriated, and comparing with them the positive and anticipated benefits, we are constrained to admire the liberality of the legislature, and deplore the misapplication of their bounty. It is imperatively our duty to examine cautiously the system ascertain its imperfections, and as far as practicable apply a remedy: while, therefore, I earnestly recommend the appointment of commissioners to examine the free school system, and detail to you minutely all errors existing in its organization or administration, permit me with deference to point out what I conceive to be radical imperfections. The distribution of the schools over the state is erroneously predicated on the estimate of taxation and population...the location of the schools should depend wholly on the population to be instructed, and should be

established on principles adequate to the object; if insufficient, it would operate to produce hostility to the system, and as a waste of the sums appropriated.³²

Henry Summer urged a change in the distribution of the Free School System as a way to achieve the goal of the Free School Act of 1811. The school act outlined educating the white majority as the primary goal, and the law said that all children with no distinction should equally receive help from the free school fund. No section of the state should benefit more than another. However, Summer noted that under the method of distributing according to the federal census created an unequal and unjust situation:

The District of Spartanburg sends five members to the House of Representatives, and the Parishes of St. Philip's and St. Michael's send seventeen. Three hundred dollars are allowed to each member of the House for his District. Spartanburg then receives \$1,500, and the Parishes of St. Philip's and St. Michael's, the sum of \$5,100 If the undersigned is correctly informed, Spartanburg has a larger number of voters than the Parishes of St. Philip's and St. Michael's; and yet the former receives less by \$300, than one third of the amount received by the latter. It is asked, in all candor, if this be right?³³

Continuing to speak on the need for equity in distributing the free school fund, Summer noted, "This fund is raised for the benefit of the people, and why not let them all equally enjoy it? No fear need be apprehended from the doing of what is right, and from giving the people the means of information and knowledge."³⁴ Maldistribution of the free school

³² Harrison, "South Carolina's Educational System in 1822."

³³ Henry Summer, *Suggestions Relative to the Free School system in South Carolina* (Columbia: A.G. Summer, State Printer, 1847): 3; *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly; Agriculture, South Carolina*, 453.

³⁴ Henry Summer, *Suggestions Relative to the Free School system in South Carolina* (Columbia: A.G.

fund led many to become suspicious toward the Free School Act, Free School System, and its main beneficiaries.³⁵

The injustice of distribution had a profound impact on the attitudes toward free school education. A school fund that favored the wealthy, which prevented the majority from seeing the potential benefits of education, produced resentment and apathetic attitudes toward the Free School System while eroding the trust in the idea of general education. Also, the continuity of the mal-distribution towards the wealthy further demonstrated that the education of the majority was not the goal of the leaders of the Free School System because the petitions to ensure the white majority did benefit by altering the distribution method were ignored.

The Problem with Organization and the lack of leadership

Disorganization in the form of a lack of a governing head to oversee the free schools was another problem that plagued the Free School System and prevented the system from potentially educating the majority. The disorganization of the Free School System is best pronounced in the persistent petitions for more organization and a supervisor. One of the earliest calls for organization and a leader for the free schools was made in 1827. The Committee on the College, Education, and Religion responding to Governor's Richard Manning call for school reform solicited the aid of South Carolina

Summer, State Printer, 1847): 14-15.

³⁵ "Committee on Education, Report and Resolution concerning the Distribution of the Free School Fund and reporting by the commissioners of free schools," December 14, 1846; "Committee on education, report on a bill to provide for the uniform disbursement of the free school fund," 1847; "Resolution to have the committee on education consider increasing the annual appropriation for free schools and distributing it according to the number of [poor] scholars." "Committee on education, report considering increasing appropriations for free schools and altering the distribution of the funds," December 18, 1849.

College faculty to help solve the crisis of the Free School System. The faculty proposal listed the appointment of superintendent as the most essential need of the Free School System.³⁶

The same advice was repeated when Professors Elliott and Thornwell were summoned at the behest of Governor Patrick Noble in 1838. They, too, recommended the appointment of a superintendent to make the school system more efficient. They noted, “we would, therefore, recommend, as the first step in the revival of the Free Schools system of the state, that there should be elected by legislature, a superintendent of free schools...whose duty it should be to devote his whole time to the arrangement and superintendence of the free schools of the state, and be the responsible organ of communication between them and the legislature.”³⁷ The professors believed that a superintendent would solve the problems of communication, which stemmed from the failed and neglected duties of commissioners.

It was believed that better communication would result in a comprehensive understanding of the condition of the Free School System to which the elected superintendent could use to begin correcting the problems and obstacles that hampered the system. In addition, the faculty hoped that having a designated leader for the system would also make it a unit rather than a disjointed assembly of scattered schools. They advocated that the superintendent serve as glue to the system by being the person to guide

³⁶ “The committee on the college, education, and religion, report and resolution on the presentments of certain grand hubris and the governors message on the free schools, discussing problems and proposed solutions, recommending the appointment of a new officer and the supervisor of the free schools,” 1827.

³⁷ “Report on the Free School by Professor Elliot and Thornwell,” *The Camden Journal*, December 14, 1839.

and ensure compliance of commissioner reports, petition for normal schools, vet teachers, and give encouragement for the entire system. Allston noted that without a “superintendent, head, director, a center of accountability of responsibility,” the Free School System would remain a “lame and imperfect one.”³⁸

The creation of a superintendent remained constant conversation throughout 1820s and 1840s and yet, despite the calls for an office to lead the system, the creation of a superintendent did not transpire. This meant the pre-existing errors of the Free School System persisted, and new problems would compound. Moreover, the inability to make the creation of the superintendent office a plebiscite matter forced supporters to look on and watch the system worsen.³⁹

It must be maintained that for each obstacle and problem there is an equal and greater reaction. For example, historian Irving Gershenberg’s commented on how the consequence of a disorganized system affected popular opinion, saying, “Not being able to determine either the length of the school term nor the size of classrooms, parents could only voice their dismay at having short school terms and large classrooms by without holding their children from school this, the regression analysis suggests, is precisely what they did.”⁴⁰ Never receiving the chance to gain faith in free schools forced several parents to refuse to send their children to the free schools altogether. Disorganization not only

³⁸ Allston, *Report on the Free School System in South-Carolina*, 7-9.

³⁹ “The Free School System” *Edgefield Advertiser*, October 07, 1846; Carl F Kaestle and Eric Foner, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 210. Kaestle noted, the pattern of not appointing a superintended remained unchanged, in fact throughout much the South. “None...had a broadly accepted system headed by a state superintendent in 1860 expect North Carolina.”

⁴⁰ Irving Gershenberg, “Southern Values and Public Education: A Revision,” *History of Education Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1970): 418.

helped to make the school socially poor but physically and intellectually poor as well. The lack of organization and the rejection to create an office of superintendent also had consequences which further hindered the system from carrying out its intended purposes as laid out in the Free School Act of 1811.

The Scattered Population

Antebellum commentators argued the sparsely settled population of the South was the single greatest factor obstructing the success of the public-school systems. R.F.W. Allston noted that the people who most needed free schools were scattered throughout the pinelands with no organizational structure to unify the scattered population into a political community.⁴¹ For example, Robert Y. Hayne called the dispersed population in relationship to the Free School System, “the chief cause of our failure...it must be admitted, that in all situation where the population is very much scattered, the success of the free schools has been very partial and limited. The great expence of boarding and the impossibility of daily sending children many miles to school, are causes of this failure.”⁴² There cannot be much disputing the fact the scattered population was a major obstacle; but when considering the totality of barriers, this is one among many problematic features and obstacles of the Free School System of South Carolina.⁴³ Be that as it may, the scattered population must not be dismissed because it was quite critical to the failure of the free schools and deserves some examination.

⁴¹ R.F. Allston, “Free School System in South Carolina,” *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 16, no. 31 (October 1849): 51. Gaines M. Foster et al., *The Enigmatic South: Toward Civil War and Its Legacies*, ed. Samuel C. Hyde Jr (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 27.

⁴² Harrison, “South Carolina’s Educational System in 1822.”

⁴³ Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, 23.

The piedmont and mountain regions were more scattered in population than any other section in South Carolina and this fact hurt the yeoman and working-class whites the most in regard to establishing schools. Slow growth and low population density in the rural areas, “was an inhibiting factor in school attendance, local support, and state school reform efforts.”⁴⁴ To further illustrate this point, Paul H. Buck noted, “scattered through these barrens the poor whites lived in isolated communities remote from centres of trade and untouched by the normal currents of Southern life. Infrequently roads might with difficulty be traced through the wild, sparsely settled county...” he went on to note, “the undeveloped educational system of the South did not extend into the remote districts where they made their homes.”⁴⁵

The inability and the willingness to increase the expenditure or spend toward internal improvements to meet the needs of the scattered population reveal some reason as to why some claimed popular education impractical. To overcome the scattered population and create a common school system would have proved costly. Historian Virginia Bartel noted, “In order to serve children in rural areas at a time when transportation was virtually nil, schools would have been needed every few miles. The price to provide such a system, along with teachers to man it, was estimated at anywhere

⁴⁴ Kaestle and Foner, *Pillars of the Republic*, 204. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 10.

Edward Magdol and Jon L Wakelyn, *The Southern Common People: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Social History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980)

⁴⁵ Paul H. Buck, “The Poor Whites of the Ante-Bellum South,” *The American Historical Review* 31, no. 1 (1925): 43-44.

from \$200,000 to \$500,000 a year-sums equals to the entire annual state budget during much of the period.”⁴⁶

The important aspect of the sparsely settled rural areas is less on the geography and more on how the reality of a scattered population became an excuse for dissenters continue to argue that popular education in the South could only be limited to the poor. Case in point, Henry Wm. Desaussure, a lawyer and legislator of Columbia, argued that unlike the North, where geography was better organized and their schools managed with proficiency; in the South, “we cannot, in our situation, and without our habits, hope to attain that perfection.”⁴⁷

The lack of teachers and Normal Schools

Let us suppose that the free schools had been successful in other aspects, such as the commissioners were not confused and under-supported, the Free School System was properly funded, there existed an elected or appointed superintendent, and the schools were not pauperized but organized with a serviceable plan that overcame the scattered population. Had these parts been functional, there remained other critical problems to the success of the Free School System. The lack of teachers, the absence of normal schools, the absence of respect for teachers and the teaching profession, the quality of teachers available and the pay of teachers, all of which not only robbed the Free School System of

⁴⁶ Virginia Bartels, “The History of South Carolina Schools. Edited by Virginia B. Bartels,” accessed October 18, 2016, <http://docplayer.net/5527666-The-history-of-South-carolina-schools-edited-by-virginia-b-bartels.html>. Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, 22-31.

⁴⁷ Harrison, “South Carolina’s Educational System in 1822.”

any success but also hindered the growth of positive sentiments and eagerness for education by individual learners and the community at large.

The treatment, quality, and availability of teachers in South Carolina summarize the leadership notions and attitudes toward the Free School System and popular education. The treatment of teachers was reflected in their compensation and because compensation reflects value, and value translates into social standings, power, and influence, teachers held very little respect in the community. For instance, Governor McDuffie argued that the compensation of teachers and their social standings were degraded to the point that no man thought a teacher a worthy position. Criticizing both leaders and the community at large for not doing more to value and compensate teachers, he noted, “Nothing can be more pernicious, than the false economy which would depress their (teachers) compensation, and the false opinion which would degrade their (teachers) standing below the appropriate standard indicated by their importance.”⁴⁸ He believed that in order to raise the opinion and importance of the teacher and to secure good teachers, the compensation of teachers had to increase. McDuffie believed an increase in pay would simultaneously promote teachers social standing, increased the credibility of teachers, and the quality of the Free School System.

Governor Hanson contended that the pay and treatment of teachers were more than inadequate and warned that if the salary of teachers did not increase the Free School

⁴⁸ *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*. Elizabeth Brown Pryor, “An Anomalous Person: The Northern Tutor in Plantation Society, 1773-1860,” *Southern history The Journal of Southern History* 47, no. 3 (1981): 365. Charles Lee Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790-1840* (Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1908), 560. Kaestle and Foner, *Pillars of the Republic*, 20. Historian Kaestle noted that “most teachers of the early nineteenth century did not stay with it very long, little training was required, the wages were low, and the short seasons required teachers to combine jobs.”

System would remain stagnant. Hanson, echoing McDuffie, noted, “it is now in South Carolina a reproach to be a teacher of a Free School, as it is regarded prima facie evidence of a want of qualification.”⁴⁹ For some, the adequacy of the Free School System directly extended from and correlated to the status and compensation of teachers. James Garnett commented on the tragedy and status of teachers, noted, “when we consider that their annual wages hardly amount to as much as we give to a common day labor; thus, evidently showing that we attach a far higher value to the bodily labor exerted for our benefit than to that of the mind!”⁵⁰ Commentators generally agreed that many of the obstacles of the free schools would diminish if teachers were respected and paid adequately. Teachers were critical to the success and failure of the Free School System, and they, like the free schools, were neglected and regarded as insignificant not only by those who controlled the system but regarded even less among the community at large.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*. Governor’s Message Hanson November 24, 1840.

⁵⁰ James Mercer Garnett, “Popular Education,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 8, no. 2 (February 1842): 114–21. Garnett, Governor McDuffie, and Governor Hanson also spoke to a larger problem of the intellectual culture of the South, which was something noted also by South Carolina faculty member Francis Lieber. Ernest Nys, *Francis Lieber--His Life and His Work: Part I* (The American Journal of International Law, 1911), 106. Historian Ernest Nys, writes the Lieber believed, “intellectual culture had in fact no place in South Carolina”...noting Francis Lieber wrote in his diary, “I feel...how far I am from active, progressive and intellectual life,” 106.

⁵¹ Copeland, “The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868,” 166; Bartels, “The History of South Carolina Schools. Edited by Virginia B. Bartels,” 6; The problem with teachers caused some to reiterate the call for a superintendent. A superintendent, it was argued would ensure teachers were trained and certified. Teachers less than qualified had multiple complaints and habits that did not go unnoticed. For instance, it was noted that teachers were often absent from schools and had questionable characters. Copeland recorded that “In 1815, J.T. Watson, teachers of Free School Number Five in Charleston, was dismissed by unanimous vote of the commissioners after having been confined to jail for several days.” John Furman Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina* (State Company, 1925), 158; R.W. Allston’s attempted to introduce a teachers’ bill in 1848. The bill sought to allow commissioners appointed by the governor to select students of both sexes throughout the state to educated at the public expense to become free school teachers. The bill was lost in 1848. However, ten years later, 1858 a high school was started to educate women for normal instruction and the state paid \$5,000.00 a year to help this school train teachers, we all see that despite opposition to normal schools there was no opposition to a state supported college, “in opposing the passage of the Bill, Mr. Fielder said he was opposed to the government’s meddling with education; it was a bad thing-a very bad thing; ‘the divorce of

Many teachers who existed in rural spaces of the South did not help their case for demanding respect. In many instances, the educational attainment of instructors did not always exceed those instructed. Not only did the lack of education belittle the perception of teachers, but the lack of morality also problematized the respect of teachers.⁵²

Historian James Copeland noted “Human nature being what it is, teachers were sometimes a source of embarrassment to those who employed them. The commissioners for Orange Parish, Orangeburg Districts, complained bitterly in 1827 that several of their teachers were ‘altogether unfit to be entrusted with the morals of the children committed to their tuition, being themselves habitually intemperate and profane.’”⁵³ How would parents be expected to send their children to free schools if they existed, bear the mark of shame for attending “poor schools” and learn from unprepared teachers? It is hard to expect parents to send their children to such schools.

The qualification of the teachers seemed to be a central problem as to the respect granted the teachers; however, where would the teachers gain their skills in the South to become competent, earn respect, and receive proper compensation? James Copeland insisted that certifying teachers never gained any traction in South Carolina besides a few attempts to ensure qualified teachers. He noted, “The school act which was passed at the 1835 session of the legislature included a provision that no board of commissioners was to employ a teacher ‘until the Board shall have first examined him, and found qualified

church and state was not more necessary than that of state and education; education in this country should be as untrammelled as the air we breath-the government nowadays seemed to be taking everything into its hands-we wished they would let education alone-where people educate their children, they educate freemen where the government educates it makes tools of them, submissive votaries.”

⁵² Foster et al., *The Enigmatic South*, 30.

⁵³ Copeland, “The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868,” 166.

for that duty.” However “no mention of such examinations occurs in the various reports, except in the one submitted by the York commissioners in 1848, in which they state they have examined the teachers of their district ‘as to their qualification to teach,’ and by so doing eliminated some incompetent ones, and induced others to make better preparation.”⁵⁴ The inability to find competent instructors not only grew from the lack of pay, the sustained the lack of respect for the teaching profession, and state neglect, but it was also the result of the absence of a normal school(s) or a teachers training institution(s).

Throughout the antebellum period finding a teacher was sometimes an impossible task. There are reasons as to why there were calls for normal schools and the need for teacher training. The infrequency of teachers in the South earned teachers the title of “stragglers” or “roaming scholars.” Ads for the want of teachers were often placed in local newspapers and spread by word of mouth and it can easily be imagined how the method of finding teachers left the door open to frauds and unqualified teachers, and more tragically, if a community was filled with uneducated people how they could ensure the legitimacy or quality of the teacher? It does not seem much to exaggerate that the lack of seriousness for the occupation of teaching undermined the entire system of free schools.

The lack of qualified teachers forced many to consider ways and strategies to increase the number of teachers in South Carolina. For instance, in 1839 Professors Elliot and Thornwell, commenting on the lack of teachers, called for a teacher’s seminary to

⁵⁴ Copeland, 164.

develop a supply of teachers for the Free School System. The professors contended that it was necessary for the state invest in a teacher's seminary stating, "we doubt whether a proper supply of teachers, for Free Schools, can be obtained in any other way."⁵⁵ How was the free school system to become successful if it lacked competent teachers?⁵⁶ In addition to the professor request for normal schools, R.W. Allston's introduced a teacher's bill in 1848. The bill sought to allow commissioners appointed by the governor to select students of both sexes throughout the state to educated at the public expense to become free school teachers.⁵⁷ Nothing came of the bill.⁵⁸

Governor Whitemarsh Seabrook agreed that the employment of incompetent teachers and low wages caused much harm to the free school system and need to be rectified, as well as the fact the state colleges should be employed to remedy the problem. Whitemarsh believed the only way to gain enough teachers to develop normal schools was to develop separate institutions within the state college designed for the training of teachers. And, if the college system of recruiting men to become teachers were not efficient or desirable, he suggested establishing teaching academies in the different

⁵⁵ "Report on the Free School by Professor Elliot and Thornwell." Robert Y. Hayne comments on the free school system Charleston August 10th, 1822; Edward Bulwer Lytton and Baron Lytton, *Survey of the State of Education, Aristocratic and Popular, and of the General Influences of Morality and Religion* (E.W. & L.D. Newton, printers, 1833), 25. Lytton on the need of teachers, "'but, above all things, to obtain a full and complete plan of education, there should be schools for teachers. The success of school depends on the talent of the master: the best system if lifeless if the soul of the preceptor fails. Each county, therefore, should establish its school for preceptors to pupils; a preference shall be given to the preceptors chosen from them at any vacancies that occur in the popular schools for children...Nothing so rare at present as competent teachers. Seminaries of this nature have been found in most countries where the education of the people has become of importance."

⁵⁶ Horace Davis, "Collegiate System of the United States," *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 11, no. 2 (February 1845): 112–17.112. An isolated teachers' seminary was not the only proposed remedy to the shortage of teachers. Others argued that Southern colleges should sustain a steady supply of Southern teachers for common and free schools.

⁵⁷ Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina*. 158.

⁵⁸ Thomason, 158

regions of the South to start the process in building a supply of teachers. The success of the Free School System rested upon the ability and character of the teachers. However, he deviated from the disdain of centralized institutions by calling for the establishment of a normal school. In hopes of killing two birds with one stone, he suggested that normal schools would not only elevate the status of the teacher but also if normal schools would become centers for communities, the schools would increase the surrounding intellectual climate.⁵⁹

It is more than plausible to suggest that to the solution of teachers held one of the keys to the overcoming many of the obstacles faced by the Free School System, particularly regarding a scattered population and the overcoming the perception of pauperism. A heavy supply of teachers could have placed multiple qualified instructors in the reach of more people, poor schools would be less of a problem because schoolhouses may or may not be required if the number of teachers produced were enough that they could individual travel short distances within a district, allowing them to teach in the homes of students or in the home of teachers without dismissing agricultural demands of rural and poorer families.⁶⁰

The rejection and failure to establish any teaching institution or school maintained the problems facing the Free School System. How could the majority ever receive the benefits of education without instruction and those who instruct? Without a pool of qualified teachers, what reason would exist to build schools? The lack of teachers

⁵⁹ Free Schools Governors Message *Edgefield Advertiser*, December 05, 1849; Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina*, 571-577.

⁶⁰ Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina*, 576.

justified arguments to keep the Free School System limited and exclusive to the poor only, which further confirmed the negative cultural attitudes that the white majority held toward general education.

The problem of Cost

If laws were passed to establish teacher seminaries and normal school, the debate of cost would have remained a sure way to unravel any gains of the Free School System. Paying for institutions or establishing infrastructures for the needs of the less wealthy was rarely debated and even more, needs of the white majority was rarely acted upon in the antebellum South Carolina. State spending for the free schools entered a long-standing tradition of not spending public money for the majorities benefit. Part of this attitude extended from the belief and fear of a welfare state, communism, and the over-reliance on aid and over expenditure. For example, Historian James Ely Jr. noted that in 1822 South Carolinians held the belief that using public money for the public was to “encourage a regular system of pauperism an evil much to be dreaded.”⁶¹ Much like the Free School system, the poorhouse movement in South Carolina was also met with similar the attitudes of spending. South Carolina leaders judged that both education and poorhouses as unnecessary taxes and burdens to the people. Unlike education, the poorhouse movement gained slightly less conversational traffic among commentators. Nevertheless, the poorhouse movement helps to contextualize the funding problem of

⁶¹James W Ely, “‘There Are Few Subjects in Political Economy of Greater Difficulty’: The Poor Laws of the Antebellum South,” *LSI Law & Social Inquiry* 10, no. 4 (1985): 872. Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (OUP USA, 1991), 18. Historian Lacy Ford noted, “between 1818 and 1828, the state of South Carolina spent nearly \$2,000,000 on internal improvements, and nearly 1.2 million went directly into Piedmont canals, but Upcountry farmers who yearned for easy and reliable access to fall-line markets remained frustrated.”

free schools, as well as helping to explain how the lack of funding to free schools dovetailed with the belief that education of children was the responsibility of the family or individual which reinforced the unchallenged attitudes toward state assistance of the needy in South Carolina.

Resistance to education is even more pronounced because when the state decided to spend for internal improvements in the 1820s, as Historian Lacy Ford explained, the state often concentrated spending toward the interests of the wealthy. Ford noted, “between 1818 and 1828, the state of South Carolina spent nearly \$2,000,000 on internal improvements, and nearly 1.2 million went directly into Piedmont canals.”⁶² The construction of canals were major failures and made some in the state more apprehensive to spend on internal improvements. Nonetheless, regarding internal improvements, it was the business of all South Carolinians to denounce state funding that did not follow their interest. Thus, when several million were spent to aid the slaveholders in the Piedmont, funding for free schools remained ignored.

Cost served as a small obstacle to the success of the Free School System; small because despite commentators noting the appropriations were not nearly enough, the amount that was allotted to the system was also not enough to cause much of an uproar. In fact, dissenters who favored keeping the system small were pleased with the amount expended.

When opportunities to raise the appropriation presented itself, opponents rejected the proposals for the increase on the grounds that education was an individual’s

⁶² Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*, 16-17.

responsibility. Moreover, such actions resembled internal improvements proposed by Henry Clay's American System, which was believed to sponsor a centralized program that increased state debts. Clay's system was, by some, considered a plot to make education a national undertaking, which would have undermined state sovereignty and forced states to become dependent on federal government for aid, which would force states to be subject to federal laws. Opponents associated this with dependency, which they viewed as dishonorable and unacceptable.⁶³

This tradition stemmed not only from the belief that taxation was inconsistent with free government, but the tradition was also a consequence of the colonial past. The inability to be flexible towards taxes made the resistance to taxation a double-edged sword for those who also desired education. However, the reluctance toward taxation was enough to conclude that without taxation the Free School System would struggle.⁶⁴

The failure of the canals also lends more context as to how a tradition of opposing taxes perpetuated in antebellum South Carolina. Opposition to taxes can easily be singled out as the greatest problem facing the cost of the Free School System. For instance, when a call for tax increases was made in the 1840s for popular education, as Bartel noted, "The idea met with a roar of disapproval, particularly from the Upcountry, where resistance to 'infernal taxation' remained strong."⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it should be

⁶³ "Report on the Free School by Professor Elliot and Thornwell"; "Mr. Calhoun and The Tariff," *The Camden Journal*, December 21, 1839; Allston, "Free School System in South Carolina," 51; Herbert Adams, *Circular of Information of the Bureau of Education*, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1889).

⁶⁵ Bartels, "The History of South Carolina Schools. Edited by Virginia B. Bartels," 6. Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 170; Rogers, *The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina*, 215; Magdol and Wakelyn, *The Southern Common People*, 56-57.

remembered that resistance to taxes for popular education had historical reasons and the mal-distribution of the free school fund provided the foundation for disapproval.

Moreover, the Free School System had not offered many benefits for the white majority since the law for free schools passed in 1811.⁶⁶

Is it more than reasonable to consider the position of the South as not having the ability to pay for the increase of schools?⁶⁷ Two million dollars was spent in the 1820s for canals when the Free School System was in need of funding, reform, and improvements. Can more can be added to the case to demonstrate that the free schools were neglected by choice?

Other investments provide currency to the fact that more could have been done. South Carolina helped to sponsor the establishment and construction of a railroad during the antebellum period like several other Southern states. In fact, the General Assembly incorporated “The South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company” on January 30, 1828. The company was exempt from taxation giving it a very favorable stance among its contributors. The total cost of the railroad was mostly paid for by private funds, but the state did give money and resources to help see the railroad completed. The important takeaway of the construction of South Carolina’s railroads was the support and enthusiasm given by the legislature and the general population, something that the free schools lacked. The idea that the vast company, created by the state, exempt from taxes being able to gain the support from the same minds that resisted spending money on

⁶⁶ Ely, “There Are Few Subjects in Political Economy of Greater Difficulty,” 874.

⁶⁷ Jack Kenny Williams, “White Lawbreakers in Ante-Bellum South Carolina,” *The Journal of Southern History* 21, no. 3 (1955): 360–73.

universal education is a questionable occurrence. Investment in the railroad underscores the fact that the so-called commitment to cultural ideas of independence and the use of public money was subjective. Additionally, South Carolina's supposed commitment to a laissez-faire government and conservative spending was also subjective. If the legislature could fund internal improvements for a railroad and to use their power to bend and guide popular opinion, why did the legislature fail to do the same for the Free School System?⁶⁸

The choice to keep the cost of education down allowed the problems of the Free School System to persist for decades which poisoned the system and never really gave the system a chance to be successful. If the legislature elected to develop a special tax for the expenditure of the Free School System, it was in their power to do so.

The Effects of Time on the Free School System

The ignored anthology of the problems of the Free School System had very serious side effects. Time strengthened the problems of the Free School System while simultaneously hardening the hearts and minds of the people. Over time it became accepted to believe the Free School System was inherently flawed which led to the

⁶⁸ Donald A. Grinde, "Building the South Carolina Railroad," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 77, no. 2 (1976): 86; Greenough and University of California, *Resistance to the Institutionalization of Schooling in the Antebellum Southern Highlands*, 200. Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc.*, "What investment of the funds of the state is or can be more profitable than this? where is the rail road stock or turnpike stock that yields three and four hundred per cent every year? to pass by the influence of letters on the morality, intelligence, and religion of the century; to pass by the improvement of men in their various trades, professions, and pursuits; to pass by the advancement of the people in all that constitutes their safety and their dignity, the sums expended in education are more productive than those laid out in turnpikes, railroads or slack-water navigation." E. Merton Coulter, "A Georgia Educational Movement during the Eighteen Hundred Fifties," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1925). Coulter notes "the politicians in Georgia are too busy to care to do anything for general education...for every step she had gone forward materially she had gone backward educationally. She had spent \$5,000,000 to build the Western and Atlantic Railroad...she was mighty in area-the largest state east of the Mississippi. But she had enough illiterate citizens placed forty yards apart to reach completely around the same great area, 11.

dissenting preordained conclusion that the Free School System was best as a limited apparatus for the poor because general education was impractical. Time, disappointment, confusion, lies, and frustration hardened the popular mind to become indifferent and apathetic towards education.⁶⁹ This should not be taken as a natural occurrence, but as a strategy used by dissenters. They used time to formulate the popular to the conclusion that popular education was unnecessary. Thus historians have observed the lower class with having adverse habits toward education and have assessed the apathy of the lower class as one of the major reasons for general education failures in South Carolina. What historians have often failed to understand was how the attitudes of the lower class were formed as a result of deliberate sabotage of the general education and the manipulation of cultural attitudes.

The Free School System had only known condemnation to those who led it and examined it. The Free School system as a product of the Free School Act had never manifested, and the idea of general education remained a theory or as one author contended the Free School System “is like the model of a steam engine on paper, unpropelled by the life-imparting element, or like the engine itself, which has lost its propelling power by the bursting of its boiler.”⁷⁰ Although speaking on the failures of the Free School system, the author indirectly drew out a hidden strategy of dissenters which was to present a system to the public and demonstrate the failure of system over time without actually creating a system. He contended that dissenters rightly predicted that attrition and disappointment would not only crush the hopes of those who desired to see

⁶⁹ Garnett, “Popular Education,” 118.

⁷⁰ “System of Common Schools,” 464.

education provided to the majority, but the failures of the Free School System would have a negative reaction with the cultural habits of the people that would sustain a negative perception of general education and make the majority callous toward the ideology of general education.

Attrition was another obstacle to the Free School System and popular education. Supporters sometimes felt that nothing could be done to heal the system. Historian William Taylor noted that by the late 1840s many Southerners who corresponded with Horace Mann, the chief advocate of Northern common school movement, became demoralized by the lack of growth in educational matters or measures in the South. To elucidate this point, Taylor relied on John B. Minor. John Minor was an educator and one of the editors of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, who often discussed matters of education in his writings. Minor regarded the matter of Southern education in the 1840s as worse in the prior decade, noting, “The few who indulge in enthusiasm upon the subject, must cherish this fire in the seclusion of their own hearts...we are now in a condition infinitely worse than you were then [in 1837]. The whole machinery of organization and even the policy of education is unknown to us, and with English conservatism, we distrust what is new and untried, and cling to usages that are hoary, whether they be the best, or the less good.”⁷¹

Time also cemented the confusing perception surrounding the goal Free School Act and the intended role of the Free School System. Over time, the Free School Act became legislation limited to the poor as did the Free School System. The failures of Free

⁷¹ Taylor, “Toward a Definition of Orthodoxy,” 420.

School System for over three and a half decades reinforced a false perception of the law. To illustrate the corrupting effects of pauperizing of the Free School Act and underfunding the Free School System, one author noted, by never experiencing a good system, “many have confounded an insufficient and defective system with a good and useful one. They have blamed it for the errors of its administrators, and have condemned the public support of schools, because they have find that heretofore the fund has in too many instances been squandered on undeserving object, and without producing any good results,-forgetting that we should never argue against the use of a thing, from its abuse,- and that in S. Carolina we have never yet had an opportunity of testing what is the effect on the people, of a good and effective system of public instruction.”⁷² Historian David Wallace noted “the more carefully reality is examined, the more obvious becomes the fact that before 1860 there was present quite an amount of inefficiency, confusion, and class selfishness. The glaring faults in the forty years following the Revolution have been rehearsed. In 1838 the South Carolina attorney-general and solicitors, by legislative order reported on the whole system of local government. They noted in their report the universally admitted inefficiency of the free school system, highway administration, the conditions of courthouses and jails, and the support of the poor. Multiplication of local boards, they said, crippled efforts for improvement, weakened responsibility, bred carelessness, indecision, inactivity. Each board seemed to work under the sense of enduring punishment instead of performing public service with willingness and pride.”⁷³

⁷² “The Common School System” *Edgefield Advertiser*, November 04, 1846.

⁷³ Wallace, *The History of South Carolina*, 486; John Hardin Best, “Education in the Forming of the American South,” *History of Education Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1996): 39-48.

When considering the defects, the Free School System embodied, the system could have never worked without reform; in fact, “each of these causes (the defects of the Free School System) would in itself be adequate to impair materially the utility of the system; combined...almost entirely destroy it.”⁷⁴ The unwillingness to remedy the defects, along with the inability to revise or expand the system was a tactical design by dissenters to withhold education from the majority. The ability to understand the pattern of ignoring, deceiving, laying aside, neglecting, or choosing inactivity as the course of action not only demonstrated the domination of opinion, the silent power of inactivity of the legislature but also demonstrated the Free School System never had a fair chance in carrying out its intent of educating the white majority by means of the state aid which meant the majority was to remain in ignorance dictated by the conditions set by its leaders. It is critical to view the Free School system’s failure not as a blunder but as a deliberate plan to halt general education and the diffusion of knowledge. Without this understanding, the rise and quick stumble of the Free School System may not point towards a battle between dissenters and supporters over general education and knowledge because of the domination of dissenters and their ability to shape and bend the Free School Act and Free School System to their will. Nevertheless, it is critical to view popular education as a long and continuous battle over educational access, knowledge, and power.

⁷⁴ “The Common School System” *Edgefield Advertiser*, November 04, 1846; Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina*, 554.

Part III.

Proposed Remedies to the Free School System and ideas pursued to correct the Free School System:

The accumulating problems of the Free School System did not go unnoticed. To partly understand and draw out the quiet battle over educational access, it is critical to discuss ideas and discourse on reform, proposed remedies and locate where commentators placed the blame, which ironically was often the same institution that commentators and supporters submitted their reform request. Discourse on reform did not come at a time when the failures of the system were most apparent. Petitions for reform occurred alongside the growing failures of the Free School System. Because the Free School System was defective, historians have not taken reform efforts seriously enough to wrestle or consider the fact that the lack of educational access in South Carolina was a natural occurrence of antebellum governments.

Commentators did commit time to discussing ways to redress the entire Free School System in hopes of improving the system. R.F.W. Allston, a supporter of the system, was one of the few who continuously fought for the success of the system and believed the problems of the system could be remedied albeit with dedication. Allston dedicated much time to discussing the need to remedy the defective Free School System and, “to insure the accomplishment of the end for which it (the Free School System) was established.” He saw the problems of the system as follows: 1. “lacked organization, superintendent, center of communication, or someone who was accountable and responsible for the system. 2. The system lacked support and funding. 3. The system

lacked legislation that created one or more normal schools, “a law which has been, or will be found necessary to the due organization, and successful action of every system of public instruction.”⁷⁵ 4. The system lacked a law to provide means of developing and providing school books.⁷⁶ Allston’s proposed remedies to the Free School System sought to develop useful opportunities to prevent the wider community from completely abandoning the schools where they existed. Allston claimed success, vigor, and the overturning of cultural attitudes could only occur when the system functioned correctly.

Others also discussed doing more and correcting the Free School System. Henry Summer commenting on the conditions of the Free School System and the need for popular education stated, “Should not the State do more, much more than she has ever done for the causes of education among the poor, and among the people at large?”⁷⁷ Summer urged South Carolina, mainly its leaders, to not remain blind to their needs of general education. He also urged and proposed a straightforward remedy. He noted that the state needs to commit to less talk and more action concern popular education. He believed the educational situation to be a dire one. Summer noted, “there is scarce a State in the Union, in which so great apathy exists on the subject of the education of the people, as in the State of South Carolina...South Carolina started well, but she has overlooked the importance of the work and has lagged behind. Shall she continue in this state of listlessness and indifference to the wants of her children...Shall the people suffer

⁷⁵ Robert Francis Withers Allston, *Report on the Free School System in South-Carolina* (Miller & Browne, 1847), 217.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 217.

⁷⁷ Knight, *Public Education in the South*, 224.

for lack of knowledge? Let the State of South Carolina answer! Shall the wants of the people be satisfied? Then let the legislature do their duty!”⁷⁸

To Henry Sumner, education was a paramount concern. He even served on a special committee appointed by a resolution of the legislature whose job was “to prepare a plan to distribute the free school fund, and to suggest such further modifications of the present system as they may think proper,” provided several recommendations. One of Summer’s recommendations included compulsory attendance for children between the ages of seven and fifteen.⁷⁹ Summer’s recommendations failed to spark any activity. In fact, historian Edgar Knight noted the Summer’s report produced ‘splendid nothings because the state was more interested in the “building of railroads than they were in the cause of education.”⁸⁰

The failure of the free school system led Governor George McDuffie, in 1835, to call for “radical” reforms. He noted, “there is no field of exertion, public or private, in which the duties of parent and patriot can be usefully and honorably, as in the improvement, superintendence, and inspection of the primary schools; and it is to be hoped that every enlightened citizen will regard himself as a trustee of these elementary seminaries, and a guardian of the children who are educated in them.”⁸¹ Governor

⁷⁸ Knight, 223-224; Henry Sumner, *Suggestions Relative to the Free School system in South Carolina* (Columbia: A.G. Sumner, State Printer, 1847), 3.

⁷⁹ Henry Sumner, *Suggestions Relative to the Free School system in South Carolina* (Columbia: A.G. Sumner, State Printer, 1847), 4.

⁸⁰ Knight, *Public Education in the South*, 224-225.

⁸¹ South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*, 1848, 237-238.

McDuffie petition for change did not call for one institution but all of South Carolina institutions to bring about the reform the Free School System desperately needed.

The calls for revision continued into the 1840s, when Governor John Peter Richardson pleaded with the legislature to reflect upon the state's adult male illiteracy of 20,000, which he believed to be a complete shame and the consequence of allowing the free schools to falter and decay without correction. He noted, "I cannot seriously repeat the invocation of my last annual message, to remedy some of the glaring defects and unprofitable results of our Free School System. Is there nothing to awaken your attention or dissatisfy your hopes, in the facts, developed by the statistics of the late federal census, that more than 20,000 of the adult male population of this state have not even received the advantages of an imperfect education? Is it nothing, that this uneducated portion of our population exceeds that of any other state in the Union, while at the same time our expenditures have been proportionably greater? Is it nothing, that after an experience of more than thirty years, an expenditure of more than a million and a half on free school, their benefits should have been so unprofitably dispensed?"⁸² The governor, in short, proved the Free School System fell victim to the notions that the free schools were meant for the not only poor and indigent but also indirectly pronounced the failure of the free school was deliberate.⁸³

⁸² South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*, 1848, 237-238..; South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*, 1848. Resolution and Resolution Appendix 1848.

⁸³ Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*, Revised & Enlarged edition (Harper Torchbooks, 1964)."

The Legislature and the Faculty report of 1826

Throughout the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s Southern legislatures particularly the legislature of South Carolina rarely sought to mend, reform, or correct the defects of the popular education system. Despite, their awareness of the accumulated problems of the system and the growing ignorance throughout the state; leaders remained indifferent and neglectful to the idea of popular education.⁸⁴

The neglect of the legislators did not go unrecognized; one outspoken commentator called out South Carolina's legislators purposeful negligence. The spokesperson contended that the legislature had often dismissed, neglect, and rejected the Free School System by way of flawed arguments and unsound justification. Purposeful negligence was the only way the spokesperson could comprehend the legislature's awareness of the problems and defects of the Free School System while failing to produce any desire to correct the failing unprosperous system. The speaker stated, "the subject of education has always, very properly, commanded the most serious consideration of every wise legislator. The Free school system of this state has been canvassed for some years past with great zeal, and various propositions made to improve it, none of which seem to have met with favor enough to procure their adoption, or indeed, any change in the system which has been so many years in operation,

⁸⁴ Lucian Minor, *An Address on Education, as Connected with the Permanence of Our Republican Institutions: Delivered before the Institute of Education of Hampden Sidney College, September 24, 1835* (T.W. White, 1835)."

notwithstanding admitted defects.”⁸⁵ The failure of the legislature to correct a failing system baffled the commentator.

James Mercer Garnett, in sync with the previous commentator, noted that “the people” had long cried for popular education but the legislature had been slow and disobedient to the cries of the people. Garnett suggested that the fault of not correcting the system and the continuation of degradation of the system rested solely with the legislature.⁸⁶

Others went further in their formal accusation of the legislature; one commentator placed the blame for the failure of the Free School System squarely on the legislature’s shoulders. The commentator asked, why had common schools become objects of contempt instead of providing South Carolina with the much needed intellectual energy? Rhetorically, the commentator asked, if the common schools, in theory, were wholly impracticable, yet there exists notable success stories throughout the world and the United States, why had the South failed? The author contended the South failed because those in charge had failed to develop a new plan, or reform the old one; additionally, the South failed because the legislatures had “shut up their ears to the voice of the reformer, and, satisfied with old maxims and old paths, have borrowed no lessons from the severe

⁸⁵ “The Subject of Education” *The Camden Journal*, October 04, 1848. More on the neglect of the legislature from a national standpoint: Lytton, *Survey of the State of Education, Aristocratic and Popular, and of the General Influences of Morality and Religion*, 3. James G. (James Gordon) Carter, *Essays upon Popular Education : Containing a Particular Examination of the Schools of Massachusetts, and an Outline of an Institution for the Education of Teachers* (Boston : Bowles & Dearborn, 1826), iv.

⁸⁶ Garnett, “Popular Education.”

experience of other states or of foreign nations neglecting, the true interests of the rising generation.”⁸⁷

In a similar vein, Joseph Caldwell argued class selfishness was the problem of North Carolina’s legislature. Caldwell believed that the only interests the legislature held, promoted, and protected was their own. He noted “The apathy which has pervaded the legislation of half a century is most strikingly exhibited by the fact, that the mere expenses of the General Assembly have ordinarily exceeded the aggregate expenditures of all other departments of the Government, united to the appropriation which has been made, for Internal Improvement. The government cannot be wisely administered, where those who direct the expenditure of the public treasure, receive more for this service than the amount of their disbursements.”⁸⁸

The contradictions and selfishness nature of the legislature was called out by one South Carolina commentator seeking to make a point about on the deliberate neglect of popular education. The author, warning readers that their legislature would often claim and cheer that their spending methods reflected conservative principles and their rejection of internal improvements was a display of a responsible government all the while constructing railroads and manufacturing. The author argued that while the legislature would accept certain internal improvements, while others like popular education was rejected and counted as an unusable expense.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ “System of Common Schools,” 460-463.

⁸⁸ Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina*, 6; Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc*, 6; “The Common School System” *Edgefield Advertiser* November 04, 1846.

The manifestation of purposeful neglect of the legislature is best understood by considering all the obstacles of the Free School System mentioned in this entire section and balance them with the faculty report of South Carolina College on the Free School System requested by the South Carolina legislature on December 20, 1826. The report detailed important reform suggestions by the faculty of South Carolina College and could have alleviated, most, if not all, the obstacles of the system discussed in this chapter.

This section will provide a breakdown of the report in order to show the extent of neglect and how the neglect by the legislature should be viewed from the standpoint of strategy against popular education. If the legislature had adopted the changes proposed by the faculty, the discourse and calls for reforms to mend the problems of the Free School System that persisted throughout the antebellum period may not have come to exist. Three times the faculty of South Carolina College was solicited to develop recommendations for the Free School System and none of the proposed reforms were adopted. This report illustrates the neglect and sabotage of the Free School System.

The report began with the faculty noting the importance and relationship between general education and a society governed by law. They noted, “no society has a right to exact obedience to the laws from those members of the community, who, without any neglect on the part of their parents or themselves, have had no means of instruction so as to enable them to acquire reasonable information of what the laws are which they are required to obey.”⁹⁰ Because education was necessary to survive in a society with laws

⁹⁰ Knight, “An Early Educational Survey in South Carolina.” This is not an article but rather the publishing of a long and detailed primary source concerning the status and recommendations of the Free School System in South Carolina by members of the South Carolina College.

they concluded that educational opportunities for all was an act of common justice. Beyond that, they echoed the feelings that any government that relied on mass ignorance was despotic and any free government that lacked education soon became despotic. After outlining their general arguments as to the importance of education, the faculty took to commenting on the Free School System and making a suggestion to correct the system's defects.

Taking on the issue of the scattered population, the faculty recommended temporary submission to the dispersal of the population and locating schools. In 1826, the faculty argued it was not possible to bring education to every doorstep, without teachers, support, and better officials. They suggested as, Memminger of Charleston would later argue in 1850, that there should be a concentration on developing schools where they were most needful and allow the system to grow incrementally.

The faculty suggested the hiring a superintendent as a leaders who could help shoulder the responsibility of the system and someone fully committed to the system rather than a disinterested legislature. They noted, "it is not easy to devise an efficient system for a population so differently circumstanced. Nor can any system work well that is not subject to the inspection and superintendence of person interested in its success...."⁹¹

The faculty believed the success of the Free School System depended on holistic responsibility and funding. They called for parents to help pay for the schooling of children on the impression that if parents helped to pay for the schooling of the children

⁹¹ Knight.

that would prevent the devaluing of the free schools and counter the negative stereotypes which kept many parents from sending their children to school due to the free school pauper stigma of being free of charge. The faculty also thought that parental help in funding the schools would promote and aid in the upkeep of the system. They reasoned that by including parents into the funding of education, parents would become more involved in the affairs of the school system because parents would want to keep a close watch on the results of their money. The faculty contended that if the people had a psychological attachment to the schools that would increase their desire to see the success of education.

The faculty brought out a unique feature of the people and responded to the cultural attitudes and habits of the South Carolinians to propose remedies. For instance, they did not see taxes as the only option to organize monies and ensure equitable distribution. They contended that if the state collected taxes for education as a way to pool resources, the people would see this endeavor as an act of charity rather than community organization. The faculty grasped the social and cultural effects on the school system and desired to make it compatible with the ideas of the people. They noted, “the common feeling of the laborious class of citizens among us revolts at an obligation that looks like the bestowing of alms. They would rather pay a small sum to a good school frequented also by the children of the more opulent parents than send their children to a charity school.”⁹²

⁹² Knight, “An Early Educational Survey in South Carolina.”

The faculty decided that if 350 schools were established throughout the state in the locales that benefitted those most in need, the state had to increase the appropriation to no more than \$65,000. They argued that \$65,000 would not be enough but they wanted to ensure the parents also funded the free schools. They contended “it is not reasonable to assist those who will not assist themselves; the parents who produce a family are as much bound to contribute to their education in a reasonable degree, as to their food. On the plan now proposed it is certain that no more money will be asked from the state than the exigency of the case requires; for those who ask it, must contribute equally.”⁹³ Through this approach, the faculty sought to make popular education a popular endeavor.

Commissioners commanded a lot of attention from the faculty. They noted many of the commissioners failed to transmit their report, and those who completed the reports often returned inaccurate and non-detailed information which made it difficult to ascertain; in what way, the Free School System, achieved or did not produced, the expected results. The reports, the faculty noted, “may be sufficient for a report of the committee satisfactory to the house, but the more detailed information would be useful to the public.”⁹⁴ Thus the faculty revealed that their hands were tied in developing a comprehensive plan of reform because they lack detailed and useful information, they admitted that “Each district varies so much in its local circumstances from every other, that the Faculty feel themselves incompetent to lay down a detailed plan which shall equally fit every situation and contingency.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Knight, “An Early Educational Survey in South Carolina.” 41.

⁹⁴ Knight. 41.

⁹⁵ Knight. 42.

Their last recommendations for the commissioners were to ensure that the reports of the commissioners became compulsory and penalties assessed for those who do not return reports; they also created a rubric for the commissioners to use when assessing schools in their districts, which would help to gain information about the overall condition of the system. This recommendation, though fifteen years after the system was established, demonstrated the lack of thought and energy put into the system of free schools for the majority after its inception.

The faculty also spent time on the topic of teachers' concerning their competency and salary. They suggested that the state set up a system of teacher certification by allowing the faculty of the state colleges to examine prospects. Moreover, they recommended that the legislature provide comfortable salaries for teachers, which would assist in securing better teachers, allow the teachers to remain in the state, and promote the teaching profession. The faculty believed ensuring the competency of teachers while increasing their salary would have positive ramifications. They, too, like other reformers understood that well-supported teachers and competent teachers were necessary to grow a successful school system.⁹⁶

This report indicated that even with the lack of information, the various problems of the Free School System were well known. The neglect of the Free School System and why the Free School System failed to reach the doors of many of lower-class whites in the antebellum period was not merely a clumsy mistake but planned failure. Historian David Wallace noted that nothing came of the report by the faculty, only that it

⁹⁶ Knight, "An Early Educational Survey in South Carolina," 40.

negatively ruffled a few feathers in the legislature.⁹⁷ One could argue that their proposals not only aligned with the goals of the 1811 Free School Act that sought to guarantee a prosperous system that would grow over time to the majorities benefit but also had the legislature adopted the recommended changes, the school system would not have accrued as many defects, side effects, disappointments, and disgust wrought by neglect and time.

If popular education was ever to become an effective system, the state legislature had to be the fuel and engine behind the system. The neglect of the legislature played an enormous role in the failure of the Free School System. Their apathy, indifference and deliberate neglect crippled the system. Free schools were never given a fair chance to succeed because the legislatures throughout the South helped to ensure the Free School System's or common schools stagnation and failure through a myriad of strategies.⁹⁸ The failure Free School System and the failure of the legislature should not be viewed as an honest error but a deliberate response to the reflection of an education policy that extended to the white majority.⁹⁹ The perversion of the Free School Act and the unresolved obstacles of the Free School System presented the perfect concoction of a timely failure which continuously reinforced cultural attitudes that devalued public education and left the education status quo unchallenged. As a result, not only did dissenters achieve their desire of resisting popular education but also, by establishing the

⁹⁷ Wallace, *The History of South Carolina*. 461.

⁹⁸ "The Free School System" *Edgefield Advertiser* October 07, 1846.

⁹⁹ Kaestle and Foner, *Pillars of the Republic*. 200. Education historian Kaestle noted, "the legislature failed to make any fundamental change," the reasons who could range from "rural opposition to new taxes, urban indifference to educational innovation, and elite domination of the legislature..." but no matter the external factors, the legislature role in the failure of the Free School System can be understood as one of several factors that hinder the system, or the one large part of the system that if the legislature put intellectual thought and physical effort into the free school system, they could have secured a serviceable free school system.

arguments and evidence that free schools were contrary to republican virtue and impractical, dissenters had developed a popular mind conditioned to think and respond negatively on the mentioning of general education.

Chapter 3

The Desires and Ideas of Reformers

Supporters of the Free School System had significant barriers to surmount if ever a serviceable Free School System was to manifest itself in South Carolina. Among the major barriers reformers needed to address and overcome were the attitudes of the leaders and the mentality of the white majority toward popular education. Reformers tried to change the mind of their peers in a variety of ways. The most popular entry point for reformers was to discuss the necessity of popular education for a Republican government. Reformers also favored discussing the advantages and disadvantages of popular education. This section explains how reformers attempted to counter the negative perception of popular education as a degrading institution against republican ideology by arguing that a republican government required popular education and that popular education was wholesome for the entire society. By so doing, reformers wanted to convince listeners, mostly leaders, that popular education was not a dishonorable idea or institution, but instead was a gateway to expressing a more perfect republican ideology and Republican government.

Popular education as a required institution was a philosophy that did not have much traction in the United States before the American War for Independence. Following the American Revolution, several American leaders contemplated the necessities of the young Republican government. The formation of the new government stirred the minds

of such individuals as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, causing them to consider “the democratic theory of education.” Through their popularity, discourse on popular education gained attention.¹

Jefferson and Adams both expressed their sentiments regarding the importance of education and Republican governments. Adams noted that no expense would be too great for the education of the masses. He believed that the core of a government, particularly a Republican government, relied on the minds of the people.² Jefferson said more on the matter. He felt education was an essential element in regards to the safety of the people while also providing citizens with the intellectual wherewithal to protect their own liberty. Jefferson suggested that education enabled citizens to discern their position in society and their relationships with other men and government. Essential to Jefferson’s call for popular education was his belief that society had a sincere desire and determined fate to become corrupt and degenerate. One conduit of this fate, Jefferson explained, stemmed directly from ignorance and concentrated intelligence. In theory Jefferson considered popular education with greater emphasis on an educated class as a means of serving as a check and balance to the social and political power to those of the ruling class. Jefferson concluded the existence of an intellectual class and some form of general education would ensure their governments remained rightfully and judiciously

¹ Edgar Wallace Knight, *Public Education in the South* (Ginn, 1922): 115. Virginia Bartels, “The History of South Carolina Schools. Edited by Virginia B. Bartels,” accessed October 18, 2016, <http://docplayer.net/5527666-The-history-of-south-carolina-schools-edited-by-virginia-b-bartels.html>: 6.

² *Common Schools. Remarks on the School Law of the Last Session of the Legislature: And Information Concerning the Common Schools of Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, &c. &c.* (gratuitous distribution., 1826). Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, *Ideals and Ideologies: A Reader*, 8 edition (Boston: Pearson, 2010): 31-34.

administered. As a result, Jefferson believed the balancing of power would be enough to make a Republican government safe from corruption.³

Following the American War of Independence and throughout the antebellum period, many supporters of education followed Jefferson's and Adam's lead by arguing that popular education was a necessary component of a Republican government. Some revolutionaries, as well as educational supporters, believed the proper operation of government went beyond the concentration on the economy. Instead, the appropriate operation of government also rested on the policies that affected the social morals, law, and culture, which is called political economy. In short, a Republican government required citizens to be committed to republican ideas in a cultural sense. Educational reformers considered popular education as a critical institution to the political economy and sustaining the republican government.⁴

The spirit of popular education not only touched men like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, but it also reached leading politicians of South Carolina like Richard Beresford and Francis Marion. They too, Historian Furman Thomason noted, "was influenced to favor better facilities of education for reasons similar to the need for trained republican citizens but also for "more efficient management of the business of the planter and merchant."⁵

³ "Avalon Project - Notes on the State of Virginia," accessed October 21, 2016, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffvir.asp.

⁴ Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*, Reprint edition (The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 6-10.

⁵ John Furman Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina* (State Company, 1925).

In the early republic, it was argued that “schools and the means of education were regarded as the mortal enemy to arbitrary and despotic governments; they were the surest basis of liberty and equality.”⁶ Historian Edgar Knight noted that education was also a defensive strategy to “prevent youth from acquiring ‘unreasonable predilections in favor of alien institutions and manners’ and prejudices against those of their own country” and against the condition of the society of which their interests and duty require them to become members.”⁷ This spirit, Knight noted, promoted and established many educational initiatives. In addition to developing republican citizens, education was also viewed as a tool to help the new nation find an identity, which was a catalyst for educational progress from 1775 to 1825, serving as a forerunner to the educational reform movement that took place in the 1830s and 1840s. Unfortunately, as Knight pointed out, this spirit to expand educational opportunity to the majority did not inspire the South as much as it did the North.

Education was not a traditional political issue in the South, and the lines of dissent and support were not clear. Historian Guion Griffis Johnson noted that neither Federalists nor Anti-Federalists had a consensus on the question of popular education nor did the lines of demarcation become clearer overtime. Whigs disagreed with Whigs and Democrats would also dissent among themselves. Education as a matter of governmental function was a loose question and opinions widely differed. Johnson noted that some argued that Republican governments required education and was a necessary part of government while others claimed “that the functions of the government were purely

⁶ Knight, *Public Education in the South*, 117.

⁷ Knight, 117.

political,” and thought state-sponsored education encroached “upon the personal liberties of the individual, one of the inalienable rights of man.”⁸ Moreover, public education was un-republican, because it taxed all for the benefit of some.

Throughout the 1810s and 1820s the call for popular education to secure the stability of the republican government continued and, in some ways, increased. The democratic revolution, which conferred universal white manhood suffrage throughout the nation, increased the conversation of popular education. The expansion of the ballot drew fears of ignorant voters, and the presence of ignorant voters reverberated the fears of the potential for social decay and an unstable government as Jefferson apprehensively believed. Reformers argued that popular education must become the basis of universal suffrage because no Republican government could sustain itself, under an ignorant voting majority.⁹

The conversation on the need of popular education for a Republican government continued throughout the antebellum period. The supposed fragility of the young Republican nation and the potential for social decay because of societal changes enlarged and welcomed arguments of popular education. In effect, popular education had results in the North, manifesting itself in the rise of common schools. However, the South fumbled, and popular education never gained enough momentum to produce similar results occurring in the North. The South remained steadfast in the resistance to popular education despite the popular philosophy that declared education a need for a Republican

⁸ Edward Magdol and Jon L Wakelyn, *The Southern Common People: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Social History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980): 56.

⁹ Fletcher Melvin Green and J. Isaac Copeland, *Democracy in the Old South: And Other Essays*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 22.

government. For example, Thomas Jefferson, the suppose great supporter of education, voted against state-sponsored schools following Charles Fenton Mercer's petition to avert the entire educational fund in Virginia to develop common schools instead of using the educational fund for the University of Virginia.

The University of Virginia was Thomas Jefferson's pride and joy. Thinking Charles Mercer's plans ill-advised, Jefferson did not take well to Mercer's request to deprioritize the University of Virginia and to make the university a secondary objective to common schools. Jefferson was successful in blocking Mercer's plans. It should be noted that no Southern state allowed the development of a common school system to take precedence over higher education. In the South, popular education was an afterthought.¹⁰ In addition, discourse on the relationship between education, Republican government, and appealing to republicanism often placed the status/class struggle over knowledge front and center.

The hope of appealing to republicanism to gain the necessary support to make popular education a success continued throughout the antebellum period. The attempt to define popular education as a necessary good, was, in fact, supporters' efforts to wrestle against the status quo and changed the belief that popular education was anti-republican. By endeavoring to make education a republican virtue, commentators sought to appeal to the political emotions and instincts of the leaders and their followers. As advocates for popular education, arguing that popular education was necessary for a republican

¹⁰ Carl F Kaestle and Eric Foner, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983): 79; Douglas R. Egerton, *Rebels, Reformers, and Revolutionaries: Collected Essays and Second Thoughts*, 1st edition (Place of publication not identified: Routledge, 2013): 98-99.

government, while positioning dissenters against popular education as enemies and traitors to republican ideology and republican government.¹¹

South Carolina, Education, and Republican Government

The argument that the new republican government required education to stabilize the state and ensure citizens could adequately discern their interests and position in society remain a highly robust argument for popular education in the antebellum period. In fact, South Carolina commentators and supporters played on these arguments to force the readers to not only think deeply about the needs of government but also to force readers to challenge and re-judge popular education's benefit to republican ideology with the hopes of the popular mind perceiving it as an honorable pursuit rather a dishonorable endeavor and a mark against republicanism. As supporters fought for popular education, they undergirded their arguments by arguing that the lack of popular education was a symbol of inequalities within society.

For example, H.J.G. Groesbeck believed that popular education was a tool that allowed republican governments to maintain its cohesiveness; however, whenever a republican government lacked popular education, unity between citizens wasted away. Groesbeck noted, "If there be a want of mental cultivation, as a consequent, the numerous attractions which hold in harmony and union the relations of society will be destroyed, and general darkness and misery prevail. On the contrary, if there be an expansion of

¹¹ Edward Bulwer Lytton Baron Lytton, *Survey of the State of Education, Aristocratic and Popular, and of the General Influences of Morality and Religion* (E.W. & L.D. Newton, printers, 1833), 35.

mind, these ties so necessary, so sacred, will receive new strength; and universal joy, and beauty and brightness pervade the whole social impact.”¹²

Viewing class inequality at the heart of the matter of education, Groesbeck advocated the redistribution of knowledge in the form of popular education. Education, the Groesbeck contended education must be “brought down from her high abodes...through every grade of society...disseminated with a liberal hand to every portion of the community...the inferior and superior mind drink at the same fountain.”¹³ He believed without such diffused education, neither republican ideology nor republican government can function correctly because a republican government depended on a harmony which only education could foster while propelling republicanism. Groesbeck contended that if the unity of a nation depended on education, and if education was necessary to fulfill the republican promise of liberty and equality then education must be popular and diffused and could not remain hoarded by the ruling class.

Utilizing a historical perspective, Lucian Minor argued that the complexity of Republican governments necessitated popular education. Unlike monarchs who authorized the domination of state matters to a few, Republics, Minor contended, required the soothing of passions, the negotiations of diverse interests and opinions that must be morphed into one solid plan for the benefit of the many. To fulfill the needs of a Republican government, Minor argued republics “requires extensive and accurate

¹² H. J. Groesbeck, “Influence of Free Governments on the Mind,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 1, no. 8 (n.d.): 389–93.

¹³ Ibid, 390.

knowledge, supported by all the powers of reasoning and persuasion...”¹⁴ Consequently, republics have to be sustained through education of all its administrators, which included all citizens.¹⁵

Hoping to arouse the passions of the leaders and seeking to make education a necessity of republicanism, Minor contended that popular education was attached to the goals and aspirations of the revolutionaries. Minor argued that the revolutionary generation believed education was the only way to grasp the concept of republicanism and to protect the individual liberties and maintain proper government.

Minor, seeking to reverse the trend that argued against education as a public necessity, also suggested that those who opposed popular education not only went against the goal of the revolutionaries but must be counted as aristocrats seeking to undermine republicanism and to control the republican government. Minor noted that those who oppose popular education failed to see that a republican government “recognizes but one class-the people; and but one interest-the interest of the people. To the good of the people the exertions of all must be directed; and this end, to be clearly discerned, and steadily pursued, requires the public mind to be enlightened.”¹⁶ He argued that education served as the only faithful companion of freedom and needful for the stabilizing of a Republican government.

¹⁴ Lucian Minor, *An Address on Education, as Connected with the Permanence of Our Republican Institutions: Delivered before the Institute of Education of Hampden Sidney College, September 24, 1835* (T.W. White, 1835): 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁶ James C. Bruce, “Popular Knowledge: The Necessity of Popular Government, a Lecture,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 19, no. 5 (1836): 292–302.

Groesbeck and Minor both placed education at the center of the discussion of justice within a republican government. The battle between dissenters and supporters, which represented a more protracted struggle over knowledge is on full display when commentators speak of popular education as a need for equality, and most, if not all, advocates for education within the argument for a well-balanced government did so with the hopes of swaying readers to recognize a connection between the absence of education, unjust rule, imbalanced social relations, and the dangers of ignorance. Not only that, but supporters were also looking to reiterate the need for general education within society because without education it was impossible to perceive and judge the ills of society correctly.

For more examples, W.J. Tucker argued America needed public education because the nation's constitution was developed by enlightened persons and thus the constitution was imbued with "wisdom and thought," which could only be maintained by the citizens who were also filled with wisdom and knowledge. Thus, if the Republic was to maintain itself "is it not the duty of each one of us, to exert all his influence, however limited or extensive it may be, to diffuse just and enlightened principles throughout our country; as far as he is able, to encourage education and the distribution of general knowledge, so that this rich inheritance may be preserved pure and unsullied, and handed down to posterity as a legacy more precious than gold or silver or lands."¹⁷

Another reporting to the South Carolina General Assembly noted education is needful for free citizens to complete their duties. As citizens, each person was responsible

¹⁷ W. J. Tuck, "The Mind, Its Powers and Results," *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 10, no. 11 (November 1844): 662–66; William S. W. Ruschenberger, "Education in the Southern and Western States," *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 11, no. 10 (October 1845): 607.

for electing representatives that will carry on the work of government, but the author argued that without education the voting citizen was unknowingly without true autonomy. How can the citizen fulfill his duties without education? The author noted, “Our republican institutions depend, for their perpetuity, upon the virtue and intelligence of the people. The state acts unwisely, to say that least, which does not afford the means of instruction to every child in the land; for we know that all power resides in the people—so say our different constitutions—and upon this idea, our institutions are these privileges, it is certain that the liberties of the people are in danger.”¹⁸

To bring the readers to a deeper perspective, it was often the tactic of supporters and advocates to juxtapose the educational policy of Republican and monarchical governments. For instance, on the subject of general education and the balance of power, Groesbeck asked leaders to ponder the differences between the mental and intellectual freedom of governments and requested his readers to inwardly respond to the question, had the educational policy of the South contradicted a monarchical government as it should? Questioning the mental awareness of his readers and the educational policy, Groesbeck, asked, “do we behold such an aspect (universal education) under despotic institutions? Do they encourage the universal growth of mind? Do they hold out a common inducement to eloquent and lofty effort? Or insure to the superior genius an enduring fame?”¹⁹

¹⁸ South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*, 1848; Edward Bulwer Lytton Baron Lytton, *Survey of the State of Education, Aristocratic and Popular, and of the General Influences of Morality and Religion* (E.W. & L.D. Newton, printers, 1833), 33-34.

¹⁹ H. J. Groesbeck, “Influence of Free Governments on the Mind,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 1, no. 8 (n.d.): 391.

Groesbeck contended that Monarchal governments omitted popular education as a government practice and by consequence, the condition of education or the promotion of general education by a government was a reasonable instrument of evaluation to determine the true essence of a government. Thus, if a Republican government required intelligence than unlike a monarchical government it should promote general education. Establishing this logic, Groesbeck argued that a true Republican government rejected the ideas that concentrated education among the few. He noted, "In a republic, mental influence is not confined to any one particular sphere, but illumines by the same beneficent rays the summits and the depths of society"²⁰ In showing the South's educational policy, Groesbeck sought to display that the lack of education was purposeful and were the corrupting effects of a monarchical government. Groesbeck wanted readers to take hold of the opinion that without general education their Republican government did not exist and the "whole representative system is a delusion and mockery."²¹

Echoing Groesbeck, J.E. M'Conoughly writing in *The Southern Quarterly* noted, the failure of popular education in a Republican government is a government that can no longer be viewed as a Republican government and must be labeled as a despotic government. He reasoned that if the American Republic that held "a democratic theory of government and aristocratic institutions for the education,"²² was a betrayal to all citizens because without education they remained unfit to rule.

²⁰ Groesbeck, "Influence of Free Governments on the Mind," 391.

²¹ Charles Lee Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790-1840* (Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1908), 849.

²² J.E. M'Conaughy, "System of Common Schools," *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 6, no. 12 (October 1844): 462.

Stability, Ignorance, Republicanism, and Education

Appealing to the more cultural side of republicanism, some commentators argued that republican governments required popular education because it prevented slavery induced from ignorance. For example, James Bruce contended that ignorance was incompatible with freedom and where ignorance prevails, slavery abounded. By adjoining ignorance to slavery, advocates like Bruce attempted to place education as a requirement to honorably fulfill the tenets of republican ideology while also arguing that the lack of education was a manifestation of shameful dependency, inequality, and oppression.

To Bruce, education was power and necessary power to ward off oppression. Providing an example on how education staves off oppression, Bruce remarked that in tyrannical governments the intelligent classes had always demanded respect and any attempt to remove the freedoms from the intelligent classes had resulted in either protest or revolution. However, Bruce argued that the ignorant classes when oppressed consistently had their rights scaled back and the history of Europe bear testament that all were slaves who remained ignorant. Bruce contended, if intelligence protected freedoms then in a supposed Republican government education was a republican necessity. Bruce indirectly sought to prove that the lower classes were in a state of slavery despite not being physically enslaved. To remedy this problem, Bruce believed popular education had to keep pace with freedom, else, the Republic would become a despotic government unbeknownst to the great majority.²³

²³ Bruce, "Popular Knowledge." 292; S. S. (Samuel Sidwell) Randall and Henry Stephens Randall, *Mental and Moral Culture, and Popular Education* (New York: C.S. Francis; Boston: J.H. Francis, 1844), 127.

Without education those who held power had the option to rule by fraud and force. Bruce desired leaders to see that the lack of knowledge was anti-republican, and ignorance turned freemen into slaves. Bruce called the expansion of the white male franchise fraudulent and anti-republican and an example as to how ignorance made the common man susceptible to fraud and extortion and subjects of the educated. Bruce stated, “Men steeped in ignorance and pride may march boldly to the ballot box, with the idea that they are free, -they may record their votes, with this motive fully impressed on their minds, but it is, at last, a flattering delusion. A freeman is governed by his own reason and his own conscience, and the moment that he surrenders his reason and his conscience to the keeping of despot or demagogue, that moment he ceases to be free. Equality of power supposes, and imperiously requires, an equality of knowledge, and without this equality democracy is but a name to delude-republicanism but an empty.”²⁴

Bruce and others attempted to persuade his audience to accept the thesis that popular education was not a hindrance to republicanism and liberty but a requisite, and as a writer in the *Camden Journal* noted “to preserve this liberty, learning should not be permitted to languish by neglect. The power that achieves liberty is necessary to preserve it.”²⁵ One South Carolina writer noted, “an ignorant people are never a free people...in all their actions, even in those where they consider themselves most free are under the direction and control of those who are more enlightened.”²⁶ The author asked, what power can an ignorant people have? “Can such a people be said to be self-governed? Can

²⁴ Ibid, 293.

²⁵ “Education and Liberty,” *The Camden Journal*, November 28, 1849. Ibid, 292. Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina*, 850.

²⁶ M’Conaughy, “System of Common Schools.”

they be justly said to possess all power in the state, when they are destitute of the only element which confers any power under any circumstances, a proper degree of intelligence?... of what value is the elective franchise to the individual who knows nothing of the nature of our institutions, or of the fitness for office of the candidate who asks his suffrage?"²⁷

Reformers challenged the attitudes toward popular education as they did in hopes of repackaging popular education as a requisite to republican beliefs. Nonetheless, because supporters had to challenge the existing republican response to popular education because within the South, which judged popular education as anti-republican, a repeal was not yet possible.

No connection between education, Republicanism, and a Republican government

Sources that denounced the connection between popular education and republican government are not abundant because society had already disconnected the two ideas. The few sources that speak directly to the subject highlighted the cultural danger of making education a requisite for republicanism and associating ignorance with slavery.

R. W. Allston noted there was no historical link between education and freedom. In fact, the author noted, some of the most despotic governments of the past had educated masses. He argued that despite the attempt of reformers the spirit of liberty was a matter of instinct and nature and not a matter of education. Appealing to the ideology of white supremacy. He stated, "no process of sophistry, no amount of ignorance, could

²⁷ M'Conaughy. Frederick Adolphus Packard, *Thoughts on the Condition and Prospects of Popular Education in the United States* (Printed by A. Waldie, 1836).

permanently enslave the descendants of the teuton race.”²⁸ Allston viewed freedom as a spirit, a spirit inherited through a racial characteristic that cannot be diminished by ignorance.²⁹

Allston understood the risk of agreeing with the opinion that if education were necessary for freedom, such notions would undermine the existing ideas of liberty, equality, independence and more importantly the societal order held together by these ideals.³⁰ If whiteness was merely a stage to freedom but incomplete without education, it could have meant that the white majority were enslaved and held a slightly higher status than enslaved blacks, because of the ruling white men and not by their own might and consequently, the notion that the lack of education meant some form of white enslavement also meant that the rulers of the South because of their property and education were not only rulers over the blacks but the ignorant majority of whites.³¹

Part II.

Advantages

Advocates of education that attempted to convince leaders of the need of popular education within a Republican government coupled their efforts by seeking to persuade

²⁸ Robert Francis Withers Allston, *Report on the Free School System in South-Carolina* (Miller & Browne, 1847): 39.

²⁹ Allston.

³⁰ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders' New World Order*, 1st edition (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 61.

³¹ Lacy K. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (OUP USA, 1991): 143. *Pro and Con; or Crawford and Adams* (John Miller, printer., 1823). “Rose Cottage Academy,” *Edgefield Advertiser*, July 18, 1849.

leaders and the general public to create more educational opportunities for the white majority by appraising the benefits of popular education.

Also, to properly contextualize the antagonism between reformers and dissenters on popular education it is important to include a broad overview of how reformers thought about the function of an expanded educational policy to include popular education. What were advocates calling to be done? And were their ideas the reasons dissenters continued to reject popular education? The desires, intentions, or wants of supporters to establish popular education are best understood by discussing what they considered to be advantages and benefits of popular education and disadvantages if the neglect of popular education continued.

Education and the development of resources

Reformers argued that one of the advantages of popular education was that it aided in the development of resources. They contended that education was the best investment for improving the South's general economy as well as individual states. William S. W. Ruschenberger contended intellectual culture went hand and hand with general improvement. He noted, "education and improvement operate upon each other; for without education, improvement will also be impeded."³² Rushenberger contended that if the South wanted internal improvement since they often found themselves "supposedly" falling behind in comparison to the North and other nations, the South had to yield to developing popular education.

³² William S. W. Ruschenberger, "Education in the Southern and Western States," *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 11, no. 10 (October 1845): 604.

South Carolina College professor J.H. Thornwell also contended that the growth of South Carolina economically depended on popular education and other internal improvements. J.H. Thornwell, noted, “it is not labor, but intelligence that create new values; and public education is an outlay of capital that returns to the coffers of the state with enormous interest. Not a dollar, therefore, that is judiciously appropriated to the instruction of the people will ever be lost. The five talents will gain other five, and the two talents other two; while neglect this great department of duty is to wrap the talent in a napkin and bury it in the bowels of the earth.”³³

Another author pandered to the commercial interests of leaders noted, “the educated mechanic, for instance, is more capable of combing into new forms whatever is already known, and of devising new methods of operation.”³⁴ The author noted that popular education had the capability to draw out moral and intellectual power whereby individuals would be more proficient and vigorous in the actions of life that would benefit industry and not subtract from industry. In addition, the belief that an educated people were better off intellectually, generally more happy, and rational, which in turn allowed the state to benefit from their ideas and productivity.³⁵

³³ John H. Thornwell, “Dr. J.H. Letter to Governor Manning on Public Instruction in South Carolina,” November 1853.

³⁴ “System of Common Schools,” *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 6, no. 12 (October 1844): 474; Edward Bulwer Lytton Baron Lytton, *Survey of the State of Education, Aristocratic and Popular, and of the General Influences of Morality and Religion* (E.W. & L.D. Newton, printers, 1833), 33-34; James Russell Lowell, “Department of Education,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 25, no. 3 (September 1858): 366–70.

³⁵ *Common Schools. Remarks on the School Law of the Last Session of the Legislature: And Information Concerning the Common Schools of Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina* (gratuitous distribution., 1826), 22-34; Robert Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc*, 1837, 10; *Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools to the Legislature of New-Hampshire: June Session, 1847. Published by Order of the Legislature* (from the Dartmouth Press, 1847).

Overwhelmingly supporters discussed the benefit of education as aid the lower classes and the political economy as an attempt to persuade leaders of the state to adopt popular education by emphasizing the potential economic gains.

The Advantage of Self-Awareness

Advocates of general education contended education provided, self-awareness, the greatest of all gifts to mankind. Supporters saw popular education as the perfect tool for the public to comprehend their self-interests and pursue their own ends.³⁶

For example, James Garnett noted that popular education was necessary because it allowed the learners to understand their own capacity, provided learners with the potential achieve optimal mental and physical health. Garnett also contended that that self-awareness gained from education humbled the learner and taught learners how to live a better and more tolerant life. Garnett was convinced that education showed the learner “the precise extent of his knowledge, and (what is yet more important) of his ignorance. It is thus, that being not ‘proud that he hath learned so much,’ but rather ‘humble that he knows no more,’ vanity and self-conceit will be most certainly prevented: that a wise doubt of his own infallibility will make him tolerant of dissent from his opinion: that he will be prepared at all times to extend his acquisitions easily and judiciously-proving...the sciences are social, and flourish best in the neighborhood of each other...in this point of view, it will be found that ‘a little learning is not a dangerous thing.’”³⁷

³⁶ The ideas of education providing awareness presupposes that without education the majority was at a disadvantage and by ignorance they had very little choice but to follow the interests of the educated which was a detriment to the majorities well-being.

³⁷ James Mercer Garnett, “Lectures on the Obstacles to Education,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 1, no. 13 (September 1835): 725–34. On awareness of Rights which education draws out Daniel Tompkins wrote: “The following was addressed by the lamented

Garnett sought to reform the ideas of the majority but also the ruling class. He hoped that the education of the unnamed masses would simultaneously uplift them which would lead to them becoming a formidable challenge to the judgments of the ruling class. Hence, the ideas of the supporters contained a hidden objective of altering the mental status quo while hoping to bring greater equity between ruling whites and the white producing class.

Another example, James Bruce contended establishing popular education granted the laboring man, the opportunity to regain a holistic view of man and permit him to notice his relationship to other professions and trades but also non-corporeal ideas like to time and God. In essence, the laboring man's mind will be set free with popular education enabling him to see himself as part of larger plan and becoming an authentic interpreter of his freedom as well as the proper limits of his freedom.³⁸

Education and improved morals

Historian Carl Kaestle noted in his study that Americans in the early to middle of the nineteenth-century people from all walks of society and various educational beliefs generally agreed that education improved morality.³⁹ For example, one South Carolina

patriot and statesman, Tompkins, to the New York Legislature: "I cannot omit inviting your attention to the means of instruction for the rising generation. To enable them to perceive, and duly to estimate their rights—to inculcate right principles and habits of morality and religion, and to render them useful citizens, competent provision for their education is all-essential." Lytton, *Survey of the State of Education, Aristocratic and Popular, and of the General Influences of Morality and Religion*; "Education," *Edgefield Advertiser*, October 17, 1839; Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc*; Carl Heinrich L. Retslag, *Political Sketches, 12 Chapters on the Struggles of the Age*, 1854; "The Common School System," *Edgefield Advertiser*, November 4, 1846.

³⁸ James C. Bruce, "Popular Knowledge: The Necessity of Popular Government, a Lecture," *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 19, no. 5 (1836): 292–302.

³⁹ Carl F Kaestle and Eric Foner, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983): 101.

author believed education could help make all persons mentally sound and improve morality. In addition, the author found knowledge allowed the poor to rise above their financial status by enhancing their morals.⁴⁰

Another author called universal education “glorious consummation,” because it had its greatest work in improving morality and thought of education as a savior of mankind. The author noted “the time shall surely come when true and universal educational shall dispel the dense night of ignorance and perverseness that now enshrouds the vast majority of human race, shall banish evil and wretchedness almost wholly from earth, by removing or unmaking the multiform temptations to wrongdoing, shall put an end to robbery, hatred, oppression, and war, by diffusing widely and thoroughly a living consciousness.”⁴¹ Despite the grand idealism, listing morality as an advantage of popular education was a pivotal addition to demonstrating the potential benefits of universal knowledge.

General Improvement

For some, education provided the advantage of producing general improvements for the majority, mostly the advantage of increasing the status of the learner. However, the advantage of improving the status of the majority indirectly challenged the status quo and its defenders. Nevertheless, supporters declared what they thought the benefits of education were regardless of the awkwardness of the topic. For instance, one author noted, “it will scarcely be denied by any one, that the improvement of the mind increases

⁴⁰ “We Can Be Rich Without Money (Lucre),” *Edgefield Advertiser*, October 29, 1845.

⁴¹ “Universal Education,” *The Camden Journal*, October 17, 1849.

the capacity for successfully pursuing any mode of occupation. From the most intellectual to the most mechanical pursuit, it will invariably be found that the man who has had his intellects sharpened, and his powers of observation and application increased by the discipline of a good education, will far surpass him who has not enjoyed the same means of improvement.”⁴² While arguing how popular education provided general mental improvements for the majority, the author also wanted to show how education provided the majority with the potential to increase their status. Undergirding the author’s comments were unsavory sentiments of class inequalities, by taking a jab at leaders, the author, sought to remind leaders of the advantages they held over the majority was partly because of their intellectual advantage over the majority who had not the opportunity or access to education.

Robert Wickliffe of Kentucky expressed similar sentiments that education provided the majority with general improvement, which included an increase of status, the ability for the learned to detect vestiges of inequality and respond accordingly, which held the potential to restore equality within society. The author noted:

That knowledge is power, is an axiom too generally admitted requiring demonstration. Its truth is equally obvious, whether in respect to individuals or to communities. Who possesses the greatest influence over the minds, and consequently over the actions and fortunes of his fellow men? It is not the man of exorbitant wealth; but it is he who with integrity of character unites the most intellectual mind.” “all minds cannot be made equal in intelligence; for nature has

⁴² *Common Schools. Remarks on the School Law of the Last Session of the Legislature.*

endowed them with different capabilities of improvement. But in proportion as the minds of the people are enlightened, they approximate real equality, and are enabled to discover and defeat the acts of demagogues and the designs of tyrants. Instead of looking abroad for counsel and direction, the mind relies upon its own resources; the character of the man is elevated; he becomes independent in reality, as well as in name, and appreciates the value of that liberty of which before he made only a senseless boast. How changed would be the face of things, were the avenues to knowledge the open and free to the whole community! How many minds of diamond brilliancy, would be brought from the pit of indigence, to sparkle on the brow of society! It is now a consolation to the poor father and mother, that politically, their offspring have power to rise to the highest offices in the state; but what would be their affections for republican institutions, could they see their country with a benignant hand, bestowing that mental wealth which would enable their children to enter, with the sons of the rich, the bright path of usefulness and honour! Irrecoverable, hopeless degradation, would forever cease; and the aged parent, who had been struggling through life to elevate his family to an honorable rank in society, would feel his youth renewed in the expanding mind and opening prospects of his rising children. Where there are schools open to the poor, this picture is often realized. Their children become the most useful and eminent men; the brightest ornaments of society, and in the race of honorable promotion, far outstrip the pampered sons of wealth and luxury. To the republican, the means which thus elevate one half of society, and in a great degree counteract the disparity of wealth, and restore man's natural equality, cannot

indifferent. The improvement of morals, the subjection of appetites and passions, and the increase of enjoyment, which spring from education, make it not less interesting to the moralist, the philosopher, and the Christian.” In the increase of individual power, and the elevation of individual character, consist the increase of the power and the elevation of the character of that society of which they form the constituent parts. If, at the present moment, every man in the state were well educated, what would be its relative standing among surrounding communities?⁴³

Wickliffe comments are rife with ideas of class injustice and inequality, which he argued was the offspring of limited education of the majority. Wickliffe and supporters of general education promoted the diffusion of knowledge as a method to improvements and brought equality to a society where it had departed, but such ideas would have alarmed dissenters and viewed the idea of popular education as a tool to restore equality as a threat to their way life. The listing of advantages of popular education at times carried political messages of revolution while others were not as politically charged.

The Desire to Reach All

Among the most significant desires of supporters for popular education was the aspiration to educate as many children as possible. As early as 1811 Governor Middleton

⁴³ Ibid, 18-19. Robert Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc*, 1837, 8. On rejecting pauper notions Wickliffe noted, "the spirit of the people, I may be told, is manly and free and will never brook to receive instruction at the public expense. Nothing noble, nothing independent can be expected from minds that have depended for their improvements upon the liberality of the state or the charity of the rich. A man that has energy, talents and ambition, will rise by the force of his own exertions, and those that have neither, it would be a waste of money and of time to teach. But, fellow-citizens, is a poor man's son to be degraded because he is forced to work at the plough, the anvil or the plane? is he to be disgraced because he honorably receives from the public that knowledge which in time will return with ten-fold interest?...If there be a rich man too proud or a poor man too much ashamed to send his children to this institution, they are both devoid of that dignity and independence which are the boldest and broadest features of an American freeman."

urged the establishment of popular education to extend the opportunity of education to all who desire to learn. Middleton in his annual governor's message, noted, "I cannot suffer the present occasion to pass without bringing to your view the propriety of establishing free schools, in all those parts of the state where such institutions are wanted...there can scarcely be a difference of opinion on the advantages which a country must generally derive from the instruction of the its people..."⁴⁴ Decades later, Governor John Peter Richardson II also called for the expansion of the Free School System of South Carolina, exhorting, "by diffusing its advantages within the reach of every man's dwelling and family, it would perhaps more than compensate for any additional burdens which it might be supposed to impose on the people."⁴⁵

The seriousness of expanding educational opportunities convinced Honorable H.A. Wise, serving as a judge in South Carolina to petition for an increase of taxes to raise money to extend the advantage of educational access for all citizens. He stated, "does any one ask, how far education should be carried? I answer, to the utmost possible extent. Why has not this institution been enlarged, and additional professorships endowed! Why does not the state freely apply patronage to every Seminary of learning within its limits? Why does it not remodel and vivify the free school system and extend and elevate the primary instruction! Is there any object more entitled to attention, or more

⁴⁴ South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*, 1848, Governors Message Henry Middleton November 26, 1811.

⁴⁵ "Governor's Message John Peter Richardson II," *The Camden Journal*, December 1, 1842.

worthy of care? Is there any scheme of enterprise, of which the successful prosecution can confer equal benefits upon the people? No-there is no such object.”⁴⁶

A member(s) of South Carolina General Assembly in 1847 reported similar sentiments on expanding educational opportunities to reach as many children as possible. The writer(s) reported that general education in the state was severely inadequate and it failed to reach the majority because “nothing short of a plan, by which the advantages of education and useful knowledge can be placed within the reach of all, can any considerable improvement be anticipated.”⁴⁷ The writer contended that there existed a correlation between the success of the Free School System and a commitment to reach as many children as possible.

The Desire to Educate Women

Included in the desire to reach and educate all was also the desire to educate women. The nationalist period set off a call for a definition of the political role of women. The conclusion of this call resulted in the role of mothers to raise republican citizens within the domestic realm or the ‘private sphere.’ Encompassed in the new position was a call for women to be educated to become republican mothers. The call for female education in the early to a mid-nineteenth century was a continuation of republican motherhood.

For instance, writer N. Carolina called for the education of mothers as a way to be “well prepared to train the mental faculties of their offspring; and that, as the earliest

⁴⁶ Hon. H.A. Wise, “Tax Yourselves!,” *Edgefield Advertiser*, March 20, 1844.

⁴⁷ Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*.

intellectual as well as physical nutriment is derived from the mother by the child, she should be fitted with care of her responsible and momentous duty.”⁴⁸

Comparing and measuring the worth, value, and need for women’s education. N. Carolina noted in another publication that no nation could build itself which neglected the education of women because ignorant women impeded progress. Carolina articulated that the republic is best preserved when the mothers supply the virtue and knowledge of its institutions in the nursery,⁴⁹ adding, “who has the laying of the foundation, and therefore the greatest agency in rearing the edifice of character? Woman. Tis her’s to aid the feeble, faltering tongue, to change the infantile animal cries into articulate sounds, to mold elementary voice into correct pronunciation...every instructor of youth has reason to regret the imperfection of nursery education.”⁵⁰

Another author noted that the revolution had a major effect on the education of women and experience had shown that attention on women’s mental development just as important as the mental development of men. In the call for more women’s education, the author contended that women are the foundation of the republican government and their education was the first education of the children.⁵¹

⁴⁸ N. Carolina, “Female Education: Young Ladies Seminary, at Prince Edward Court House,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 1, no. 9 (May 1835): 519–20; Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Ruth Miller Elson, *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century*, Edition Unstated edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972).

⁴⁹ N. Carolina, “Female Education,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 6, no. 6 (June 1840): 451–456.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 451.

⁵¹ “Communication,” *The Camden Journal*, May 7, 1836.

Another commentator asked his audience to think about the importance of women as educated mothers. Being entrusted with the care of the young, should mothers be capable of all teachings and training? Or shall she be left in ignorance? The author noted that children depended on the capabilities of the mother and when the mother was left in ignorance she was incapable of teaching children. In addition to teaching children, education was necessary for women because it also made them better wives. The author noted that “shall the wife be incapable of reading or responding to her husband’s letter-or to rise higher her fitting place as his companion and helpmeet? It is evident the best interest of society demand of the one sex an education corresponding to all respects to the education of the other.”⁵²

James Garnett believed the mind of women was equivalent to a small school, making women’s education necessary, and a path to popular education. Garnett reasoned that since most women would become mothers, the advantage of education would benefit women and help to fill the void of popular education with the added benefit of reducing the population of ignorant parents.⁵³

One author contended that educated women were as vital to keeping the republic pure as were educated, men. Thus, he called for the general society to put their energies together to educate both men and women.⁵⁴ William Rushenberger reasoned that if the country desired good and virtuous citizens, peace, and political progress, then women

⁵² Lowell, “Department of Education.”

⁵³ Garnett, “Lectures on the Obstacles to Education,” 726.

⁵⁴ All were not thrilled with the efforts to education women, see “Mount Tabor,” *Edgefield Advertiser*, April 25, 1849.

ought to be educated, he stated “are we to leave uneducated, the mass of females under twenty, and lose forever the influence which they bring upon their offspring? How truly has it been said, that the education of males is thrown away, if the unholy lips of ignorant, degraded and impure mothers, breathe their moral contamination on their infant mind.”⁵⁵

James C. Bruce noted, “It is needless to say that any plan of education which does not include the female part of our population, would fall far short of a complete or a useful system. The measure of a country’s enlightenment is the estimate which it places on woman.”⁵⁶ To not educate half of the population because of gender differences made little sense to Bruce. The work of completing a civilization built upon freedom would be imperfect if women were not provided the tools to refine and purify humanity. Bruce believed that education must reside in the hands of a woman as well as men if freedom was to abound in a Republican nation. Although women were not by law excluded from education, supporters deliberately sought draw women into the discussion of popular education to demonstrate how Southern culture neglected the education of women and how the lack educating women affected all of society.

Education helps to level the playing field between the rich and poor

Advocates desire to lessen the gap between the rich and the poor, as well as, see the poor on a more equal intellectual and an educational plane lead many supporters to comment and call for the establishment of popular education. It must be understood that

⁵⁵ Ruschenberger, “Education in the Southern and Western States,” 607.

⁵⁶ Bruce, “Popular Knowledge.”

in seeking or discussing the idea of leveling the opportunities for rich and poor advocates opposed dissenters' desires to maintain intellectual inequality.

The seriousness of popular education as the battle over knowledge was on full display when advocates dovetailed the advantages of popular education with class commentary. The tone of the discourse of general education changes because the opinions and arguments by advocates directly attacked the status quo, which advocates believed was directly modeled and framed to leave the masses ignorant and diminished their chances at upward mobility. The hope of balancing mental powers between classes meant increasing the lower classes educational access, which involved providing the tools for the lower class to challenge the existing structure of society and if necessary reorganize society.

Class intellectual differences were apparent enough that supporters of education were forced to explain the role education played in sustaining the inequalities of society while advocating for popular education. Hon. H. A. Wise provided a synopsis of how limited educational opportunities created inequalities within society. If the maxim, "knowledge is power" is true, Wise asked what type of power does knowledge provide? Wise noted it provided a power which "prostrates all political inequalities; it is the power which overcomes all physical obstructions in the way of man; castes and ranks and grades bow before it," he noted, knowledge possessed the power to "humble tyrants." Wise calculated that if it is indeed true that, "knowledge is power," then it must also follow, that "ignorance is weakness, utter impotent weakness."⁵⁷ Wise desired for the

⁵⁷ Wise, "Tax Yourselves!"

lower class to comprehend the connection between knowledge and power, and for the leaders of society to recognize that the disparities within society were outgrowths of intellectual inequalities. Wise hoped the truth of some society's inequities and inequalities would force all citizens to seek a remedy to the intellectual problems by establishing a useful school system.

To Wise intellectual differences were not a small issue. He contended that education made such a great difference in social relationships that the moment educational opportunities are unequally distributed freedom and equal between persons cease to exist. He noted "we say all are born free, and equal-that may be so. But if we were all born so, the state of freedom and equality does not last long in life, if one man is to be cultivated in his mind, whilst the other is permitted to grow up in ignorance. How is the man who cannot read and write the equal in power of any sort, except muscular power, of the man of letters?"⁵⁸ Wise thought popular education necessary to provide a fairer balance of power, to secure equality, and provide each the opportunity to defend their freedoms. Hon. H.A. Wise stated "Ignorance among the People destroys the liberty and equality of the people; it makes inequalities in the social state; it gives one man a preeminence and preference among men over another in the political state; it makes the weeds of the earth too strong for man's physical might to earn his bread; it makes the rich richer, and the poor poorer...it is the sycophant and slave of tyrants, and the foundation of despotism; it not only enslaves the citizens, but enervates the state."⁵⁹ For Wise, the

⁵⁸ Wise.

⁵⁹ Wise, "Tax Yourselves!"; Robert Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc*, 1837, 6.

lack of popular education was extremely harmful because the lack of general education was a producer of inequalities and oppression.

Echoing the sentiments of Hon. Wise, commentator A.W. Ely also noted that the lack of popular education weakened equality in society while fostering inequality and oppression. In an environment where education among the majority lacked education and ignorance reigned, “man oppress his brother man: deprives him by force or by fraud of his most valued rights: crosses his path at every turn: violates the sanctuary of his home: blasts his reputation; crushes the fairest flowers of hope and affection which sprung up around his path-and systematically prepares pitfalls for his destruction, even while professing for him the highest regard.”⁶⁰ Both Ely and Wise argued that to forgo the establishment of popular education was to invite and maintain oppression.⁶¹

In less radical rhetoric, commentator M’Conaughy noted when educational opportunities were available to all; education would have the power to restructure how society viewed marks of distinction and honor beyond the importance of wealth. The author believed that if common schools were established where the rich and poor attended, the psychological advantage that wealthy held because of their wealth would take a back seat to achievement and merit, which M’Conaughy believed would level the ideas of distinctions and honor between classes provided greater balance.⁶² The hope that

⁶⁰ A. W. Ely M. D., “The Education of the People,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 14, no. 10 (October 1848): 597–602; Charles Lee Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790-1840* (Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1908), 604-605.

⁶¹ Mercer, Society, and Society, *A Discourse on Popular Education*, 18.

⁶² M’Conaughy, “System of Common Schools.” 473; Edward Magdol and Jon L Wakelyn, *The Southern Common People: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Social History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980):

education would lessen the social gap between the rich and poor was considered a significant benefit in a society where wealth and education customarily crowned citizens superior and classified the less wealthy and uneducated as inferior.

The belief that popular education could assist with the negotiations of female education, moral behavior, produce better workers, and provided advantages to the economy may have been overtheorized and idealistic; nevertheless, the comments of supporters provide valuable insight into how they saw the world of the South without equitable educational access. Although their ideas and arguments for popular education did not change the prevailing attitudes towards general education during the 1830s and 1840s, they did provide a groundwork for the similar views that were expressed in the 1850s. Their words also unveiled some of the justification behind the various calls for popular education. Becoming more familiar with specific reasons for the request for general education provides context as to what advocates desired and what dissenters of popular education misunderstood or understood as the goals of popular education. Thus, the calls for general education also helps to situate what dissenters were resisting and the type of society they were seeking to protect.⁶³

58; *Common Schools. Remarks on the School Law of the Last Session of the Legislature*, 14; *Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools to the Legislature of New-Hampshire*. 25”

⁶³ Charles Fenton Mercer, American Whig Society, and Princeton University Cliosophic Society, *A Discourse on Popular Education: Delivered in the Church at Princeton, the Evening before the Annual Commencement of the College of New Jersey September 26, 1826* (Princeton Press, printed for the societies, by D. A. Borrenstein., 1826), 36. Charles Mercer saw education as an advantage because education was to him property, he noted, “may it not be very confidently affirmed, that education would operate, if not immediately, in diminishing, ultimately, as the most powerful check upon the extension of pauperism, not only by preserving man from the thoughtless improvidence which so often leads to extreme want, but by conferring on him a species of property, the most valuable, of which no vicissitude of fortune could ever deprive him?”

The Desire to Educate Farmers

Nothing expressed the seemingly repressed desires to bring more equity to South Carolina's social order than the argument and desire for educational opportunities to exist, specifically farmers. At times, supporters' requests and hopes for extending education to farmers were more aggressive and revolutionary in rhetoric than general calls for popular education. Those who desired more education for farmers not only argued for access to education for farmers but also suggested that farmers use the education gained as a tool to command respect and to challenge the status quo of South Carolina's society. The calls for educated farmers placed class discontentedness at the center of education reform.

One author from South Carolina contended that those who worked in agriculture received little recognition and honor for their duties. Regarding education, Southern culture did not hold the education of farmers in high esteem nor thought it necessary to educate farmers, which consequently contributed to the belittling of the farming occupation. In the perspective of the author, the non-education of farmers and the low status of farmers seemed inverted considering that all professions and people of Southern life rested and were dependent on the success of the farmers. The author stated, "usefulness none will deny, but as to the honor that is another thing. It ought not be so, but the present state and condition of society is entirely the reverse of its design. Based on the societal importance of the farming occupation, the author felt that farmers should have the highest honor and status in society and one the chief reasons farmers did not hold the honor measures by their importance was because farmers lacked education. The author stated, "Because education has not had its popular influence. The productive

classes have received its benefits in only a small degree; consequently, the other professions by its aid have assumed the ascendancy.”⁶⁴ The author suggested that as long as farmers remained without education, they would continue to be disregarded, ignorant, and without the power to influence culture leading to esteem for the farmer.

These comments are revealing in several ways. The writer suggested that the neglect of educating the majority was tied to the status of farmers which was the result of cultural beliefs dictated by educated persons who not only designed a reality that falsified the farmers’ importance to society but also withheld the tool of education to prevent the potential of the majority from challenging and potentially correcting the negative cultural perception of the farming occupation. The call for popular education at times went deeper than providing an opportunity for learning to those that lacked access, it was often a petition from and for lower statuses of society to seek out education as a tool to adjust the Southern imagination on the proper status, honor, and importance of the farmer. In essence, the call to educate farmers was also a demand to adjust in Southern society.

Others supporting the education of farmers interpreted the educational policy of South Carolina, which focused on a few and specialized professions as a strategy to dominate the white majority. Many supporters deduced that the neglect and lack of education for farmers was a direct result and consequence of the farmers’ lack of power and low status in society and concluded that the lack of intellectual power of farmers played a role in the ruling class domination by way of intellectual hegemony.

⁶⁴ “Agriculture and Education,” *The Camden Journal*, January 18, 1842.

Consequently, one writer called for the education of farmers to challenge the ruling class and the most influential of society and those who had sustained the cultural status quo that demeaned the farmer.

Several advocates desired the education of farmers to gain power but what was included in the pursuit of knowledge and power was the expression of discontent. The discontent of farmers stemmed directly from their witnessing how high-status persons not only dominated knowledge and the educational resources, controlled the type of knowledge exalted, but also witness how these persons who emerged from educational institutions constructed, managed and directed laws that favored the interests of the ruling class which often belittled the world of the farmer and the common folk.⁶⁵

One author believed the time had arrived for farmers and common folk to learn to think for themselves and seek out their own interests and education was the first step to achieving these ends. The author urged farmers to pursue education but refrain from abandoning the farm because neglect the farm would continue to belittle the farmer and honor the intellectual ideas of other professions. Speaking more like a tactician, the author also urged farmers to educate themselves to create their own culture define honor from themselves, and maintain the courage to refrain from taking life cues from those that dominated them and who had historically failed to look after the farmers best interests.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ David Brown, "A Vagabond's Tale: Poor Whites Herrenvolk Democracy, and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South," *Journal of Southern History* 79, no. 4 (November 2013): 799–840; Jack Kenny Williams, *Vogues in Villainy: Crime and Retribution in Ante-Bellum South Carolina* (University of South Carolina Press, 1959).

⁶⁶ Whitling Shingles, "The Camden Journal, September 8, 1849.

To change the state of farmers and take the proper steps toward progress and education, another author called for an extension of learning branches and equality of resources to balance the majority's investment in the educational infrastructure which the ruling class and learned profession had dominated. The author noted that the time had arrived for the majority to invest in themselves with the intention of uplifting the farmer's occupation and remedy the history of neglect.⁶⁷

Further commenting, the author reiterated the need to have educational institutions dedicated to the farmers. The author noted, "It may be said we have good schools now-this is true; and it is doubtless true that the branches provided for are as well as taught as their means will permit, and that they answer all the purposes of the learned professions. But something must be done for our profession. We wish them so educated that they can bring all the treasures of science to the improvements of the farm and the workshop." The source of many of the author's frustrations was what seemed to be blatant neglect of the education of the farmers in all facets of society, particularly within the curriculum. To illustrate, the author noted, "Our sons are taught to trace the root of a word up through the French, Italian, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, to discover its true-meaning. But who of them can trace the root of a potato beneath the soil and discover the food it seeks there?"⁶⁸ Consequently, the author called on the farmers to band together to break the cultural ideas that resisted the education of farmers which included a change in the science of education to focus on agricultural studies.

⁶⁷ "Call for Education of Farmers," *The Southern*, 1852.

⁶⁸ "Call for Education of Farmers."

The degraded status of farmers also bothered others, but their comments presented a less fiery tone. An author from South Carolina recognized that South Carolina culture had demarcated book learning beyond the bounds of farmers. Thus, the majority, from this cultural idea were not only shunned from formal education but because farmers had long been without formal education, farmers had learned to accept the notion that farming did not require education, which contributed to their lack of honor. To reverse this trend, the author insisted that farmers use their numbers to demand state-sponsored education for the majority with due regard to the interest of the farmer which should include the hiring of an Agricultural Chemistry and Geology professor at South Carolina College.⁶⁹

Advocates, supporters, and reformers did more to understand the fact that opportunities for farmers did not exist because Southern culture had walled up the avenues for mental improvements. Most believed the unequal access to education as an injustice stemming from more profound problems hidden within the social system. They theorized and concluded that the ideologies that formed the cultural normality and the status quo which seemed neutral and fair [which allowed for its prevalence] and was respected by all was not all fair in reality and often caused the farmer to sink below a status in relation to their importance.

⁶⁹ "Agricultural Education," *Edgefield Advertiser*, April 16, 1845. Bryan J Clinche, "Education in Missouri, Boston, Washington, South Carolina, Arkansas, Germany," *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 18, no. 2 (February 1855): 285–88. "Call for Education of Farmers."

Chapter 4

Sectional Tension and Southern Education

Discourse on popular education increase in the 1850s not only because of the discourse of the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s but also because of a changing social and political landscape which had a lot to do with the sectional tension that mounted throughout the antebellum period that came to a peak in the 1850s.

As sectional tension swelled in the late antebellum period Southern society became a place of Northern, particularly abolitionist, criticism. The Southern general educational situation or the lack of a situation was of the favored attacks from Northerners. Comparing literacy statistics between the North and the South was an effective tool for the North to claim that the “slave” South could not keep pace with the progress with the free laboring North. For instance, in comparing Massachusetts and North Carolina, one author noted there is a great difference in ideology toward the education of the majority. The writer noted, “Massachusetts says to her poor, intelligence is power. It is right that your children should be educated and thus have a fair chance with the children of the rich. I will build school houses, therefore, and educated your sons and daughters. The promise fulfilled, and out of her whole population, Massachusetts in 1840 about 4,000 men and women who could not read, and those mostly foreigners.”¹ In

¹ “Education-North and South,” *The North Star*, April 20, 1849.

contrast, the author asked, what was the ideology of North Carolina toward educating her laboring class? North Carolina, “flatters them, talks to them of the dignity of white people, and suffers their children to grow up in gross ignorance, without the power to spell a word in the Bible or decipher a line of the Constitution of the Union.”²

In the opinion of the author, the South, particularly North Carolina had failed their majority. Southern educational habits, which perpetuated ignorance among the general population robbed them of true liberty and manhood but covering their folly with white supremacy rhetoric. The author contended, the lack of educational access in the South not only doomed the black enslaved to a childlike and servile state but the white laboring and poor white populations as well.³

As sectional tension advanced, Northerners continued to attack Southern ignorance. Criticism from the North often painted the South as a haven of slavery and ignorance. Anti-slavery and anti-Southern discourse believed that exposing the ignorance would arouse anti-slavery supporters, North and South, and to show all Americans that the union would do better as a country without slavery. One author noted, “slavery prevails in the South but does not in the North, and where slavery reigns, ignorance reigns.”⁴

Statistics aided the argument of anti-slavery supporters but some went a step further to note Southern institutions particularly slavery was an educational blockade for

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Who Will Be Harmed by Emancipation?,” *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review*, October 1862: 329.

the white majority. It was the opinion of one writer in *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review* contended that the white majority would benefit most from emancipation. The author wrote, “there are over a million of non-slave-holding adult whites in the Slave States, and a vast majority of them are on the verge of barbarism. They are poor, miserably housed, scantily fed and clothed; ignorant, taught to despise labor and under the control of the most degrading passions and superstitions.”⁵ The arguments stemming from anti-slavery writers sought to inform many Northerners and Southern whites that only in the North did true equality and educational opportunities exist.

Northerners continued to place the lack of popular education at the center of the North-South divide. One author used difference in approach to general education to illustrate an uncompromising gulf division of the two regions, stating “One portion of the union struggles for the supremacy of liberty and education-the other for the triumph of slavery and brutish ignorance. How ridiculous then to talk of reconciling these extremes-of bring[ing] together.” Slavery and ignorance had force the tension between the two regions and a conflict was inevitable, as the author noted, “No party can dodge it, go over it, or around it, and succeed. Liberty and intelligence, or slavery and ignorance,’ which shall predominate? That’s the question. Anyone can take either side, but no man can take both...no more can a man be [for] cotton on one end and [for] a school-house at the other. He must be all cotton or all school house.”⁶

⁵ Ibid, 329.

⁶ “Southern Ignorance. Let Us Disguise the Fact as We May,” *The North Star*, November 24, 1848. “Slavery Against Freedom as a social influence,” *The Southern Standard*, January 22, 1853.”

It was often the case that slaveholding governments faced the accusation from Northern abolitionists that in order to maintain their power, they not only had to control the enslaved but withhold progress and enterprise, intelligence, and true democracy from the white majority.⁷ As a consequence, Southerners became more intentional and defensive in protecting the Southern society from the ideas of their critics. Historian W.J. Cash noted, “this Old South, in short, was a society beset by the specters of defeat, of shame, of guilt-a society driven by the need to bolster its morale, to nerve its arm against waxing odds, to justify itself in its own eyes and in those of the world.”⁸ Cash’s words proved true. It was often the case that Southern publicists often sought to protect the South’s reputation.

Defense of Southern culture-South not as bad off:

Southern leaders and supporters rejected the Northern commentators critique of the South as a school-less and ignorant region. Writers defending the South argued that their region was no more ignorant nor less educated than another place in the union. Southern commentators claimed that the assumption that the South was ignorant was nothing more than mere propaganda and the results of misleading statistics that favored Northern states. One writer asked readers to consider the illiteracy numbers of Ohio, Kentucky, and Illinois and compare them to Mississippi. These Northern States exceeded Mississippi in illiteracy, in hopes of showing statistics that the South was not an ignorant region and as slavery expanded so did education. In addition, the author argued that

⁷ Fletcher Melvin Green and J. Isaac Copeland, *Democracy in the Old South: And Other Essays*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969): 5.

⁸ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1941).Cash, W. J. *The Mind of the South*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1941: 61.

literacy numbers were inaccurate because the statistics did not account for students studying overseas and within Northern institutions “Such children are therefore not reported in the table of institutions, and would perhaps be omitted in that of scholars by families...again, in the same states, a large number of students are always abroad for education, and are returned to schools, and colleges of other states.”⁹ This suggested that slavery as it expanded created more progress and fixed the errors of the old slave state while showing slavery expansion developed greater than the free laboring states as the nation moved west.

The author noted, “Thus it appears, that whilst there are more than twelve times as many illiterate persons in the oldest Southern, as in the oldest Northern State the proportion changes as we advance westward, until we find a greater proportion of them in a new State of the North than in one of the South. And thus, it seems that in the New States, where children are not educated at public expense, and where, therefore their parents must provide for them, the children of the South are better educated, or rather, perhaps it would seem, that the emigration from the North, is much more ignorant than the South. Still, however, the odds of school instruction are decidedly with the North.”¹⁰ Accounting for population, geography, and westward expansion, the author, desired to persuade readers that the expanding South was not as bad off in matters of education as statistics suggested. In fact, newer Southern (slave) states had greater progress than new Northern (free) states.

⁹ Ibid, 133-134.

¹⁰ C.J., “Progress of Education in the United States and Europe,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 18, no. 1 (January 1855): 133-134.

The same writer continued to defend the South by arguing “quality over quantity.” The author noted that the number of students educated did not make the South less educated than the North; additionally, statistics lacked information and diminished the amount of time Southerners learned. Southern students spent more time in school than Northern students because Southern institutions allowed for more leisure which translated into more time granted for learning which was not the case for white free laborers in the North. The writer stated, “The average annual time of attendance at school of each child is much larger in the Southern than in the Northern states, in consequence of white labor being less required in industrial pursuits. Thus, three children at school for nine months may, for some purposes, be compared with nine children at school for three months.”¹¹ The author suggested that the attention the South provided a better quality of education because it focused on the education of few students, and the amount of time provided for learning to a few students compensated for the lack of students. The author reasoned that the South was not less educated but equally or more educated due to the leisure slavery allowed.¹²

The defense of the Southern educational habits was a paramount endeavor in the 1850s because of the constant regional comparison. Defenders of the South also argued that the South did not lack education because Southern culture by way of trickle down

¹¹ Ibid, 134.

¹² Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 10. Shore noted how the goal of slaveholders was a theory of the leisure class that allowed the ruling class to minimize their labors and direct “labor; his “work” involved “mental culture” and creation of “refined” society.” Within this theory of the leisure class, Shore quoting Shore noted, “common people, who spent their lives ‘performing a few simple operations’ with their hands, had no opportunity or capacity to consider improvement of self and society.” The ruling class “enjoyed leisure to acquire ‘improved and refined understanding,’ he had the capacity-and responsibility-to spread the polish of refinement over his society’s surface of rudeness.”

education fulfilled the want for common schools. Moreover, part of the defense against the Northern critique of Southern education stemmed from the fact that the South had concluded that the majority of the Southern population were not worth educating. While the North believed the masses should be included in the educational institutions and receive the bare minimum instruction, the South believed educating a few with high-level training held better results.

With hopes of not stoking the sectional tension between the regions, Archibald Roane defended the educational habits of the South by exalting the importance of Southern culture. At the expense of the North seeking to claim a monopoly on the country's intelligence, Roane noted, the North had overcompensated and rejected the truth that "there are other means of educating the public mind quite as effective, such as social intercourse, lectures and public discussion of great political and other questions."¹³ Roane noted it was essential to correct the errors Northerners made in their assessment of acquired intelligence. If it is true that intelligent persons could out think formally educated persons despite not ever receiving formal education nor possessing the ability to read or write, Roane contended that if an individual can be highly intelligent without formal training than what can be true of a single individual may also be true for the South as well. From this argument, Roane set up his claim to denounce common schools and the focus on educating the majority but by boasting and concentrating on the university system and the power of intelligence diffusing downwards into culture infecting the entire society

¹³ Archibald Roane, "Common Schools and Universities North and South," *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 18, no. 4 (April 1855): 545–55.

Roane contended that the Southern university system was a gift to all of the South and the Southern leaders if having to choose between a common school system and a university system, he noted, the university is much more useful. He stated, "I repeat; if a choice between the two must be made, it seems to me that no man who has regard to the honor, reputation, and glory of his country, abroad and in future time, can hesitate to give preference to the university system."¹⁴ By esteeming the greatness of the university system, he implied that great men of the South derived from the university system, and not common schools. He noted, "what is it that constitutes the greatness of a nation? It is not chiefly the sum of glorious deeds and labors of its distinguished sons in war, statesmanship, or the more quiet walks of literature and science? Blot out the names of its great men from the records of a country, and what remains to give character and renown, or make its history to be preserved?"¹⁵ General education could not produce great men, and if great men were not produced, then that nation is an insignificant nation even when that country had common schools. The author contended that the apparent preference of the South is in the more 'superior' university system. Despite the North's superior educational models for educating the majority, Roane argued, the South's university system made as many great men as did the common school system.

In short, he noted that the 'radical theories' of general education had not proved effective in the South because Southern leaders have not viewed the course of their forebears preference to the university system an error, Roane noted, "such being our opinion, we cannot for a moment doubt the decided advance we have obtained from the

¹⁴ Roane, "Common Schools and Universities North and South," 555.

¹⁵ Roane.

greater prevalence of the university system of education in our section of the country.”¹⁶

Roane’s defense of the educational system became a summary of the educational policy in the South, which placed the education of the affluent above all others. Roane believed that the lack of common schools had not made the South below the North in any way; only that, Southern institutions held a different approach to education than the North, which writers conveniently overlooked. The strategy of those who came to defend the South focused on the education of a few and the benefits of educating the ruling class rather than that of the majority.

South falling behind and the fear of Northern influence

Although there were several Southern writers who sought to inform the Northern and Southern audience of the true approach to the South’s educational policy, that did not prevent Southerners from comparing themselves to the activities going on around them. Southerners, mostly promoters of common schools, used sectional comparisons to argue that the South had fallen behind in regard to education. For example, in 1829, president of the University of North Carolina, Rev. Joseph Caldwell argued that his state lagged behind in public improvements and education by three centuries.¹⁷ Contrasting the differences between the South and other places aided the discourse on the need for more educational opportunities in the South.

¹⁶ Roane, “Common Schools and Universities North and South.”

¹⁷ Edward Magdol and Jon L Wakelyn, *The Southern Common People: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Social History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980). Charles Lee Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790-1840* (Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1908).

Nothing did more to show that Southerners perceived themselves as behind in matters of educational and intellectual matters than regional and international comparison. Southern commentators wrestled with the North-South comparison and feared that there was some truth to the argument that the South was falling behind on educational matters. Concerns were expressed as early as the 1830s. Fanny Dare writing in the *Southern Literary Messenger* recorded his thoughts on a lecture in Rhode Island by a Professor Goddard who expounded on the topic of education through regional and international comparison. Dare noted that Professor Goddard placed Germany far above any nation. Seeking to alarm readers, Dare included Goddard's comments on ranking New England above the South. Dare not only wanted his Southern readers to know that New England's educational prowess did not compare to Germany but also, to note the point--- how much further the South was behind New England. The goal was to awaken Southern readers to the need for educational improvements.

Educational comparisons forced Southerners to reexamine and gauge its educational infrastructure and institutions, which often led to calls for educational reform. For instance, the Governor of South Carolina, George McDuffie in an attempt to rouse his fellow statesmen to the need for educational and literary works elucidated the care taken of education by the Prussia government as opposed to the care taken in South Carolina. He noted:

In Prussia, the primary schools are special objects of care, superintendence and patronage of the Government, and to provide competent instructors for these elementary Seminaries, Normal Schools are established and supported by the Government, for the exclusive purpose of qualifying school-masters for their

vocation. So important is it there regarded that the masters of the primary schools should be thoroughly qualified, that they are required to remain three years in these preparatory schools, after they have learned reading, writing, and the rudiments of arithmetic, and are even then not eligible to a mastership in the primary schools, until they have undergone a thorough examination, and obtained a certificate of qualification from a competent board of examiners. It is mortifying to reflect, that not one in twenty of those instructors who have charge of our primary schools, and are thus invested with the sacred office of forming the minds of our children, could stand the scrutiny through which every school-master in Prussia must pass before he is permitted to perform the very lowest functions of elementary instruction.¹⁸

In comparing South Carolina to the North, another commentator from South Carolina rhetorically asked why South Carolina had done so little for education? With the feeling like South Carolina was fast asleep on the matter of education, the author noted, “we [South Carolinians] seem to require an awakening—infusing unto the people, some enthusiasm—for the cause of education.”¹⁹ The author asked, “why in this particular matter [education] should we be behind other states? Is the cause of education less dear to us or of minor importance, than it is to the citizens of other states? Surely not. Why then this infrequency of public endowment? Why this continued neglect of an acknowledged good? Could the wealth of our citizens, be bestowed upon worthier objects, than those which have in view the intellectual cultivation, and more improvement of our

¹⁸ South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*, 1848.

¹⁹ “Public Education,” *Edgefield Advertiser*, November 11, 1846.

countrymen? We think not?”²⁰ The commentator argued that he saw no reason South Carolina should fall behind in matters of education, which had the potential to enhance the state in every way. In respects to all other endeavors, the author contended South Carolina was equal if not above any other state, “but in matters of public education, it must be confessed, she does not maintain the rank she should.”²¹

In the late 1840s comparison of the education and intellectual activity of South Carolina with the North and international governments continued to be a tool used to arouse leaders to consider the plight of education. Commentators used comparison as a mirror for the South to cause Southern citizens and its leaders to examine the state of education. For another example, in the South Carolina General Assembly a report in the late 1840s focused on Prussia’s progress and efficiency in comparison to South Carolina. The Prussia educational system had a little over two million school-age children, with only 22,000 absentees. The number of school-age children attending school directly reflected the compulsory law, which required every child to attend either public or private school. Comparing South Carolina to Prussia as a way to condemn the past actions of South Carolina leaders in developing a educational policy that promoted general education, the writer(s) of the report noted, “This ought to teach the State of South Carolina a lesson which she should not be ashamed to imitate. Shall a monarchy make such ample provision for the instruction and enlightenment of its subjects, and shall a

²⁰ “Public Education.”

²¹ “Public Education.”

republic be parsimonious in its provisions for the same end, and deal out reluctantly the means for the improvement of its citizens? This ought to be no longer.”²²

Anticipating dissenting arguments on the grounds of introducing compulsory education, the writer(s) of the report contended that leaders cannot afford to think compulsory too much or that the system developed in Prussia is beyond the scope of South Carolina. The writer(s) contended that what had been done, is proof of what can be repeated, and wrote “Look at Massachusetts, and see what they’re doing, and what has already been done. Horace Mann, the Secretary of the Board of Education of that State, has devoted the powerful energies of his mind to the development of the system of Common Schools and will accomplish more for the good of the Commonwealth than any man in it. New York has, if possible, a better system in operation than any other State, except Massachusetts.”²³

Continuing the rebuke of South Carolina, the writer(s) wrote that since 1811 little had been done in South Carolina for education and no other place had as much disinterestedness toward education than South Carolina. The writer(s) argued that every state touching its border were attempting to do more for diffusing general intelligence than South Carolina. Despite the fast start, demonstrated by The Free School Act of 1811, the state has quickly fallen behind all others. The writer(s) stated “Shall she [South Carolina] continue in this state of listlessness and indifference to the wants of her children? She is a mother; and shall she withhold that which will satisfy these wants?

²² Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions of South Carolina to the General Assembly*, 204.

²³ Ibid, 204.

Generous to a fault, she will not, cannot, when she sees that it is her interest and her good that knowledge should be diffused amongst her people, and that the children in her borders should be made the recipients of her bounty.”²⁴ Continuing that the writer(s) asked, “who would have the hardihood to bar the gates of the temple of knowledge to the people, and shut out the poor from the blessings of intelligence? What shall be the course of South Carolina, popular education or continued degeneration?”²⁵ Through comparison, this report and others sought to persuade citizens and leaders in the South Carolina legislature that what had been done for popular education since 1811 until the 1850s was not enough and change was necessary. Reformers often used the sectional tension as ammunition to persist in their request for popular education. Thus, the change in discourse during the 1850s had much to do with regional politics just as much as it had to do with other changing variables in Southern society.

Part II.

Rejection of all things North, Intellectual Independence, and Southern Education

Through comparisons and critiques, Southerners found that education, in a vast sense, was dominated by Northerners. Common school systems, teachers, and publications (textbooks, journal, periodicals, magazines) that held fame among Southerners originated in the North. Historian Janis Greenough noted that the supposed Northern domination of intellectual matters had alarmed and threatened Southerner

²⁴Carolina, 203.

²⁵ Ibid, 204.

nationalists. Consequently, Southern nationalists determined that “Rather than make everyone conform to the dominant society as was occurring in the North, Southern nationalists were calling for a cultural blockade in which Northern ideas were to be banished from Southern schools. Textbooks needed to be written and published by Southerners and teachers needed to be native Southerners as well. The threat of an outside and alien society, one that characterized Southerners as immoral over the issue of slavery and literacy, one that threatened to alter Southern economic institutions forever, was genuine to these Southern nationalists.”²⁶ In essence, Southerners called for a rejection of all things North.

As Northern school books, teachers, school models, and literature increasingly became viewed as invasive to the Southern way of life, Southerners began to argue the necessity of Southern teachers, textbooks, and school models. As a result, Janis Greenhough wrote “Southerners began to be generally afraid that their children would be indoctrinated in Northern beliefs. School and school teachers became symbols to those who feared they were losing control of their society.”²⁷

Critical to the discussion and increasing discourse on popular education in the 1850s is to consider how Southerners analyzed and planned how they could stave off the Northern dominance and assault in intellectual matters. By considered how Southerners

²⁶ Janis Price Greenough and Berkeley University of California, *Resistance to the Institutionalization of Schooling in the Antebellum Southern Highlands*, (1999): 201.

²⁷ Janis Price Greenough and Berkeley University of California, *Resistance to the Institutionalization of Schooling in the Antebellum Southern Highlands*, (1999): 201. “Gustavus Frankenstein, “The Great Southern Convention in Charleston,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 16, no. 6 (June 1854): 632–41.; Rev.C. K. Marshall, “Home Education at the South,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 18, no. 3 (March 1855): 430–32.

thought about and defended themselves by achieving intellectual independence provides insight into how Southerners leaders thought about general education.

The need to protect the South from Northern ideology pushed many writers and commentators to call for popular education to achieve intellectual independence. This included a critical need to develop Southern textbooks, teachers, and schools. For instance, Miss Carolina Burrough writing in *The Southern Literary Messenger* contended the children of the South needed to be taught in the South and by Southerners with Southern materials. She explained to her readers that the South must guard itself from Northern ideas and rejecting Northern textbooks was a major step forward. She noted “I am willing to confess we may learn much to advantage from our Northern brethren, I would not be willing that either our morals, or taste, or even our religion, should be entirely under their guidance, the first step to prevent this would be to have their school books admitted with more caution, and not subject our children so completely to their influence from the very dawning of reason.”²⁸ Continuing, she noted that more had to be done on the part of Southerners to develop libraries with books on Southern culture and interests; moreover, Southerners needed to develop custom made schools for the Southerners.

Lastly, she noted education was a major tool for the staving off the threat of the North. Thus, she concluded that the South was undergoing a period of intellectual emergency and something had to be done to improve the Southern educational infrastructure immediately. In an attempt to reach the ears of state leaders, she noted,

²⁸ Miss Caroline M. Burrough, “On Public Education in Virginia,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 13, no. 11 (November 1847): 685–89.

Virginia's leaders must turn their attention to intellectual matters and away from empire and profit. She stressed "in Virginia we seem to be paralyzed on this [education] subject, and our patriotism would rather lead us to run to Mexico and die there of vomit, than to attend a few days, out of three hundred and sixty-five, to supervision of a school. We may easily find amongst us heads to devise excellent plans of public improvement, but there shall we find hearts to execute them-this is the rock upon which we split."²⁹

The campaign for Southern intellectual independence and investment in Southern education became a quest for Reverend C. K. Marshall to petition for Southern states to devote resources in "home education." Marshall contended that for Southerners to receive a good education that promoted Southern interests, Southerners could not remain in Northern institutions. In May of 1855, Marhsall contended that the South could ill-afford to allow Southern pupils to remain in institutions like Yale , "when the most eminent scholar ever connected with this body of professors has openly declared himself ready to shoulder his musket and march to the bloody field and resist the growth of slavery."³⁰ Marshal thought the current educational and intellectual conditions of the South unacceptable and petitioned for Southern leaders to reconsider their comment and investment to 'railroad stocks' and invest in instruction for Southerners and help make their universities, colleges, seminaries, and common schools second to none.³¹

²⁹ Burrough, 688.

³⁰ Rev C. K. Marshall, "Home Education at the South," *Debow's Review Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 18, no. 5 (May 1855): 655-68.

³¹ Marshall, 660.

Sectional tensions produced many short-term reformers and several commentators committed to better educational commitment from Southerners. For another example, Honorable Jonathon Cogswell Perkins like Marshal commented on the crucial need for educating Southerners in the South. Perkins noted that his goal was not to stir up any sectional tension or prejudice, but rather to point out the problems that Northern “institutions in the North, which, like Harvard and Yale” had arrayed themselves against Southern institutions and “have become the centres of influence upon the mind and literature of the country deeply to be regretted.”³² Thus, Perkins noted it was critical to awaken Southern students to have pride in Southern institutions so that students would have deep convictions for Southern ways.

He suggested that if he had it his way, he would have all students speak on the conviction on slavery, which would help him determined the damage of Northern influence and define the extent of the need for Southern education. Perkins went so far as to say that if Southern students confess that slavery was a great social and political evil, then the South had already lost the battle with the North because the Southern students had already been socialized to the ways of the North. Like Marshal, Perkins believed in the great necessity of education, particularly “home education,” to promote the ideas of the South while rejecting the influences of Northern education.³³

Southern Nationalists and editor of the *DeBow's Review* Edwin Heriot noted the historical error of not paying attention to the education of Southerners had caught up to

³² Hon. Jno [Jonathon] Perkins, “Southern Education for Southern Youth,” *Debow's Review Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 19, no. 4 (October 1855): 456.

³³ Perkins, 463.

the South and argued that to continue to under-estimate “the importance of the youthful mind being trained under home influence,” would be folly without recourse. Heriot noted, “the neglect of this duty has, in times past, been carried to an alarming extent; and its effects are often perceived in the fostering of unnatural prejudices, which are seldom uprooted, even after the youth has grown up to manhood.”³⁴ He noted it was imperative that the South make it their duty to guard the progress of Southern institutions, mostly by ensuring that Southern students remained in the South and were educated by home institutions and instructors.

The Call for Southern Schoolbooks and Literature

Nothing expressed the want of Southerners to monitor Southern institutional thought than the call for Southern literature, primarily the petition to create school textbooks for Southern students. As commentators wrote on the need for Southern textbooks argued that the future of Southern institutions had a direct link to the educational philosophy and training of Southerners. Southern textbooks would serve as the educational philosophy that placed pro-slavery ideologies at the core of Southern education with the intent that every pupil in Southern educational facilities would have sound pro-slavery orientation. Thus, Southern textbooks were a method to secure the continuity of Southern institutions in the battle against Northern ideas. For instance, Historian Janis Greenough noted, “North Carolina school reformer and Superintendent of Schools Calvin Wiley wrote in 1855 of the need to discard ‘books breathing hostility to Southern institutions,’ and cited a particular book’s ‘lesson severely reflecting on the

³⁴ Edwin Heriot, “Educational Reform at the South,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 20, no. 1 (January 1856): 67a-77a.

character of slave-owners.’ Jefferson Davis, future president of the Confederacy, recognized the importance of textbooks in the transmission of Southern values when he wrote, "Let me write the school books and I care not who may write the laws."³⁵ To show the importance placed on textbooks, it is good to note how many textbooks were published during the Civil War. Historian Laura Kopp noted “The fact that the South’s printers, publishers, and authors produced more than 130 unique textbooks under difficult wartime circumstances, including a severe shortage of paper and a lack of capital, hints at their significance to the promotion of Confederate values and ideologies.”³⁶

J.W. Morgan noted the most problematic nature of Northern textbooks used in the South is that that the taught against slavery, teaching Southern children to denounce Southern institutions and also their Southern heritage. Morgan noted that Southern children, “are constantly informed that their fathers, and ancestors generally, for the last two hundred years, have been a heartless, cruel, bloody-minded set of robbers, kidnappers, and slave whippers,”³⁷ teaching Southern children that the rest of the union sought to root out the ‘evil’ of slavery but could not do so because of the backwardness of slave societies.

Unfortunately, Morgan noted, the South had not taken a look at what the rising generation was learning or else Southern leaders would see that the learning material was

³⁵ Greenough, *Resistance to the Institutionalization of Schooling in the Antebellum Southern Highlands*, 89. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders’ New World Order*, 1 edition (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁶ Laura Elizabeth Kopp, “Teaching the Confederacy: Textbooks in the Civil War South” (2009): 8.

³⁷ J. W. Morgan, “Our School Books,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 28, no. 4 (October 1860): 434–40.

contrary to the Southern ideals. Morgan called for Southerners to wise up, believing the Southern leaders lackadaisical approach on the matters of Southern education “is worthy of utter and complete disapproval,”³⁸ and on the matters of textbooks, he added, “the course of the Southern public, in this particular [educational schoolbooks], is quite indefensible.”³⁹

Morgan did not see Northern textbooks as just happenstance but a clear threat to the South and a plan of the North. Many of the books from the North, he argued were crusades against slavery, and believed the North should make it plain their intent to teach the Southern youth the perspective of abolitionism and Northern pride. About Northern textbooks and their content, he noted, “let them not sail under any friendly or neutral flag but show in full view the black piratical ensign of abolitionism.”⁴⁰ But rather, he argued that Northern textbooks must be viewed as propaganda with the goal of infiltrating the South to raise a generation taught to question and reject slavery. He noted, “it would seem as though Northern cunning and ingenuity had exercised its utmost power in the furtherance of this system (Northern doctrine in textbooks sent South), regarding it, doubtless, as a most efficient mode of corruption of the minds of Southern youth, and introducing their dangerous heresies among us.”⁴¹ Take a look, Morgan asked his readers, at the histories taught in the schools and academies in the South, they all follow this plan of Northern indoctrination. The books give great praise to the settlers of the North, “as a set of incorruptible patriots, irreproachable moralists, and most exemplary models for

³⁸ Morgan, 435-436.

³⁹ Morgan, 436.

⁴⁰ Morgan, 437.

⁴¹ Morgan, 437-438.

future imitation.”⁴² While the settlers of the South, “are pictured as a race of immoral reprobates, who have handed down all their vices and evil habits to their descendants of this day.”⁴³

C.K. Marshall noted that North had done their due diligence in creating textbooks for the entire union, and, by doing so, had magnified and made known their interests throughout the nation. He applauded them for their efforts but called for the South to do the same. The South, Marshall noted, were filled with books like Northern atlases, “as containing matter of the most inflammatory character, and calculated to have the most pernicious effects.”⁴⁴

More shocking than the supposed effects of Southerners learning from Northern textbooks, Marshall thought certain books like Nathaniel Gilbert Huntington’s *Gilbert’s Atlas* broke Southern laws. Marshall believed many of the Northern textbooks were the literature of abolitionism sending hidden messages into the South, which in Louisiana and many of other Southern states the circulation of abolitionism was against the law. He noted, “Sir, this book [*Gilbert’s Atlas*] and many other Northern school books scattered over the country, come within the range of the statutes of this state, which prove for the imprisonment for life or the infliction of the penalty of death upon any person who shall ‘publish or distribute’ such works.”⁴⁵ Marshall argued on the seriousness of Northern

⁴² Morgan, 438.

⁴³ Morgan, 438.

⁴⁴ Marshall, “Home Education at the South,” March 1855.

⁴⁵ Marshall, “Home Education at the South,” May 1855. Nathaniel G. (Nathaniel Gilbert) Huntington, *Common School Atlas, Drawn and Engraved on Steel, to Illustrate and Accompany the Introduction to Modern Geography*. (Hartford, Conn.: Read & Barber, 1838).

textbooks stated that despite the vileness of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Northern textbooks were, "a thousand-fold more powerful, as an abolition, anti-slavery work, than ever the 'Cabin' claimed to be."⁴⁶

Judge Jonathon Perkins, Jr. contended that it would be very difficult for Southern students learning in the North and South to maintain the right perspective on Southern affairs, institutions, and constitutional rights when reading and learning from Northern textbooks. Describing the Northern works, Perkins noted, "from the frightful pictures of slaves at work under the lash, which ornament the child book, up to the sickly sentimentalism of their classical readers and on through the 'higher law' reasoning of *'Hickok's Moral Science,'* there is a constant effort to impress the youthful mind with the idea that slavery is a great sin, for the existence of which every American citizen is responsible until Congress acts upon the subject."⁴⁷ To reverse this trend, at least in the South, Perkins urged the rejection of Northern textbooks and called Southerners to educate Southerners, which also meant the need to promote Southern schools, universities, and textbooks to break the habit and belief of Northern superiority in educational and intellectual matters.

⁴⁶ Marshall, 660-661. Peter Vaught reported: "A full set of South Carolina school books is a great desideratum [need] in our free schools-the great diversity of school book and most of them of Yankee manufacture-is an evil, that should be corrected." (215) George C. Rogers, *The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina*, 1st edition (Columbia: Univ of South Carolina Pr, 1970). Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin Or Life Among The Lowly*, 1853.

⁴⁷ Perkins, "Southern Education for Southern Youth," 462. Describing the Northern works, he noted, "from the frightful pictures of slaves at work under the lash, which ornament the child book, up to the sickly sentimentalism of their classical readers and on through the 'higher law' reasoning of *'Hickok's Moral Science,'* there is a constant effort to impress the youthful mind with the idea that slavery is a great sin, for the existence of which every American citizen is responsible until Congress acts upon the subject." Laurens Perseus Hickok, *A System of Moral Science* (G. Y. Van Deborgert, 1853). Best examples lie within chapter four in subsection "The Unrighteous of Domestic Slavery."

Much like his call for home education. Marshall called for pro-Southern textbooks and normal schools as a way to alter the current dependence on the North 'abolitionist work', which taught the Southern youth false ideas, and to think negative against "God" ordained Southern institutions. Marshall noted, "We need textbooks adapted to our ideas, or necessities, or destiny."⁴⁸ He saw no reason why the South should not have their own textbooks because of the amount of money Southerners had invested in buying Northern literature and schools to the sum of five million yearly.

Adding to the sentiments with a focus on literature R. G. Morris, noted that Southern policy must change, it cannot continue to forsake all things Southern. Morris stated, "Southern men should patronize Southern literary institutions, and use books and periodicals published in the South when they can be procured. This policy certainly ought to be pursued by Southern men. We certainly ought to patronize our own literary institutions in preference to those at the North, when we know that our colleges and universities are equal, if not superior, to any in the United States, and not send our children to Northern colleges, are nothing other than hot beds of fanaticism,...who has grown rich on Southern money..."⁴⁹ Morris asked Southerners to patronize Southern colleges, but also asked Southerners to focus the majority of their resources and attention on developing and sustaining Southern literature as a form of nationalism. He noted "we should also discard from our homes and firesides all those flimsy, mischievous, and

⁴⁸ Marshall, "Home Education at the South," May 1855. Why should the States of the Mason and Dixon's line pay, as they do, to the states North of that line the sum of nearly \$5,000,000 per annum as tribute money- for books.

⁴⁹ R. G. Morris, "Southern Educational and Industrial Development," *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 20, no. 5 (May 1856): 622a-626a. Vernon Louis Parrington and David W. Levy, *Main Currents in American Thought: Volume 1 - The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 100-101.

pestilential Northern publications, which are inimical to Southern interests and feelings, and sustain those published on Southern soil.”⁵⁰

Edwin Heriott noted the necessity of school books for the Southern youth is due to the fact the many of the textbooks used by schools are not only from the North but, “unsuitable and dangerous to Southern youth,” which he noted must be discarded. An example of dangerous content, Heriott quested from Whelpley's *Compend[ium] Of History*, chap. 12, page 158;

This eloquently argues the question of Southern slavery: But for what purpose was he brought from his country? Why was he forced from the scenes of his youth, and from the cool retreats of his native mountains? Was it, that he might witness the saving knowledge of the gospel? That he might become a Christian? Did they desire to open his prospects into a future life? To inform his clouded soul of immortal joys' and aid him in his pilgrimage to heaven? No. He was deprived of freedom, the dearest pledge of his existence. His mind was not cultivated and improved by science! He was placed among those who hate and despise his nation; who undervalue him, even for that of which he is innocent, and which he could not possibly avoid? He is detested for his complexion and ranked among the brutes for his stupidity. His laborious exertions are extorted from him to enrich his purchasers, and his scanty allowance is furnished, only that he may endure his sufferings for their aggrandizement! Where are the incentives that may induce him to become a Christian? Alas! They are crushed beneath a mountain of

⁵⁰ Morris, “Southern Educational and Industrial Development,” 626.

desperate and hopeless grief; his views of happiness are depressed, so that he must almost doubt of his natural claim to humanity.⁵¹

How the Southern leaders had allowed the presence of certain Northern textbooks to educate Southern children in the South made little sense to Heriot. In light of the inflammatory Northern textbooks Heriott noted, “We want books now to show up the other side of the picture, and to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the young minds, hitherto misled by sophistry and declamation into erroneous views of the comparative merits and importance of the greatly wronged South, that the boot has been put on the wrong leg.”⁵²

Part III.

Nothing is what it seems, and old habits die hard:

The call for Southern intellectual independence demonstrated how obstinate the South was toward general education. The culture of resisting educational activity and all of the apparatuses that came with education, such as schools, teachers, and literature had over time betrayed the South because when the time had come for the South to seek intellectual independence the necessary engines to do so were not in place for the South to achieve their goal. Despite the requests for home education and Southern textbooks, it was often the case that Southerners did not buy into the request for doing more to

⁵¹ Edwin Heriott, “Education at the South,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 21, no. 6 (December 1856): 650–59. Samuel Whelpley, *A Compend of History: From the Earliest Times* (New York: 1856).

⁵² Heriott, 655.

produce Southern literature, develop common schools, and manufacture more educational efforts. The familiar spirits of apathy and indifference which stifled the Free School system and ideas for reform for the majority of the antebellum period had also choked the petitions to reform education during increased sectional tension in the 1850s.

Habits of indifference and examples of apathy:

The lack of a strong educational and intellectual infrastructure in the South seemed to some as a dire situation which convinced a few Southerners to commit energy to reverse the lack of popular intellectual culture. Following the Missouri compromise, nullification crisis, Bleeding Kansas and the Compromise of 1850 that aroused sectional tensions, the South often appeared to be more willing to accept the task to do more for Southern educational and intellectual institutions such as developing common schools, teaching seminaries, and periodicals; however, for every emotional charged political event that waxed warm the energies to respond to educational and intellectual matters to combat sectional tension that same energy quickly waned as the South return to apathic nature toward educational matters.

For instance, following the Missouri Compromise, the South witnessed the birth of two literary magazines, *The Southerner Review* and *The Southern Literary Messenger*. The former quickly ended publication after four years of service. *The Southern Literary Messenger* started in 1834 by Thomas Willys White best utilized the energy of sectional tension, an attempt to counteract the “supposed,” Northern educational and intellectual monopoly. Although *The Southern Literary Messenger* was able to ride the wave of sectional jealousy, it was not able to use the energy to create a Southern intellectual

linchpin. For instance, Richard Weaver highlighted the struggle of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and the frustration of its editor in his attempt to develop Southern literary energy. Weaver noted, “despite a degree of outward success [of *The Southern Literary Messenger*], however, it is plain that the Messenger had to contend with much apathy and indifference in its regional constituency. Thus in 1853, nineteen years after the hopeful beginning just described, one finds the editor exclaiming: “How glad to us will be the day, when an ardent love the liberal learning shall have supplanted some of the hobbies of Southern intellect, have roused its slumbering energies and imparted a taste for purest joys and sweetest solaces.”⁵³ The South had a distinct pattern, anytime there was an arousal of attention to literary works and education, the energy did not last long and hoped usually perished. One of the reasons that the South failed to garner a sustained energy for establishing literary works and that reforming education was temporary was because the actions to do more for education were reactive, not proactive, ebbing and flowing with political and interest-driven events.

The struggle for the South to maintain an educational and intellectual culture lagged behind the North and a few other European nations. The readership of Southern newspapers and journals was telling of this fact. For instance, De Bow’s famous “Industrial Resources of the Southern and Western States”, which concentrated especially on Southern agricultural and economic problems and was oriented principally toward a

⁵³ Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, First Edition (Washington, D.C.: Lanham, MD: Regnery Books, 1989), 85-86.

Southern audience, sold six times as many copies in the free states as in the slave, and its total circulation in the slave states was described as small.”⁵⁴

Southern historian Eugene Genovese pointed out that “The South published only one of the country’s forty-one agricultural periodicals in 1853, and whereas many of those in the free states appeared weekly or biweekly, only monthlies appeared in the slave states.”⁵⁵ As a region heavily dependent on agriculture, it seemed as if more would have been printed in the South. The low quantities of Southern literature was partly because Southerners preferred North publication which were often cheaper. However, beyond the idea of preference and cost, the South lacked periodicals because they also lacked viable reading communities which would allow periodicals to accumulate a readership. The North was partly able to have more periodicals because its reading community, which common schools along with large urban areas helped to create. The South lacked an efficient school system and did not have many large urban areas, which to some extent, hindered the growth of intellectual culture.⁵⁶

Southern textbooks being one of the chief concerns during the quest for intellectual independence was not a new idea of the 1850s. Duff Green of South Carolina had noted the importance of developing Southern textbooks for Southerners a publishing company as early as the 1830s. Green noticed that South Carolina not only lacked a publishing house, “facilities for the sale and distribution of books,”⁵⁷ but also lacked the

⁵⁴ Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, 2nd edition (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan, 1988), 129.

⁵⁵ Genovese, 129.

⁵⁶ Genovese, 129.

⁵⁷ J. Isaac Copeland, “The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868” (1957): 187.

culture and medium in which to promote and cultivate a desire for Southern textbooks and literature. Duff Green sought to change the publishing problems in 1835 and 1836. Green, “proposed to establish in South Carolina a plant for manufacturing paper and printing textbooks and he asked the bank of South Carolina for a loan of \$50,000.”⁵⁸ Duff Green failed to convince South Carolina leaders of the need for a publishing house and South Carolina went without a major publishing house for the duration of the antebellum period.

Others carried the opinion of Duff Green, although several years after. C.K. Marshall called for publishing houses believed the South would be without the benefit of educating its youth if the union had a sudden split and the South remained without publishing houses. He noted, “what if that sad catastrophe should fall upon us, like an avalanche, which scarcely warns of its approach? What condition would our schools and academies be found in, with scarcely a book to study, expect such are written with a view to arraying children, or such are printed and published by establishments, which are as hostile to our interests as the maddest fanatic who longs for brand to fire the temple and sanctuary of freedom.”⁵⁹

Marshall noted, the best thing the South could do to protect their minds from Northern ideas and educate themselves were to establish large publishing houses. He called for Southern legislatures to allow governors to utilize \$5,000-\$10,000 “to be used

⁵⁸ Copeland, 199-200.

⁵⁹ C. K. Marshall, “Southern Authors, School Books, and Presses,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 21, no. 5 (November 1856): 519–23.

in the encouragement of the production of homeschool and textbooks.”⁶⁰ Edwin Heriot agreed with Marshall that state interference was necessary, “legislative aid...appears to be the only resort left us by which the object can be accomplished.”⁶¹ Marshall noted that without state aid for massive publishing, “we shall never have a widely circulated, influential Southern literature until we adopt a measure for the encouragement of remunerative authorship. Let us awake and rise, as surely we must, or ‘be forever fallen.”⁶²

The belief that state aid had to be used to secure textbooks by Southerners for Southerners ironically confirmed what reformers and supporters argued since the 1820s, which they noted private funds toward educational matters in South Carolina where its own culture resisted educational progress could not be counted on to aid great educational projects.⁶³

Apathy dies hard

While expounding on the dangers of Northern textbooks and the need for Southern content and the lack of publishing, Marshall suggested that Southern habits played a much more substantial threat than Northern works. Southerners had a habit of discounting and degrading Southern literature. Marhsall noted Southern books were, “committed to the shelves and the shades, a legacy to moths and mould. It is true, we

⁶⁰ Marshall, 520.

⁶¹ Heriott, “Education at the South,” 652.

⁶² Marshall, 522-523.

⁶³ Marshall, “Southern Authors, School Books, and Presses,” 522. Heriot, “Educational Reform at the South,” 77.

have long been so dependent on others that we are half ready to esteem our land a sort of Nazareth and exclaim: “can any good thing come out of me?”⁶⁴ Habits, Marshall claimed will not be easily overcome.⁶⁵

Nearly, each call for home schoolbooks for Southerners exemplified the South’s folly in not developing a system for general education, producing Southern teachers, Southern publishers, and Southern literature early in antebellum period. For the South to achieve intellectual independence the South would have to boost the output of Southern literature, promote Southern scholars and scholarship, develop a reading culture, subsidize publishing companies, and develop teachers.⁶⁶

No author drew more attention to the problematic nature of Northern textbook and the challenging habits of Southerners’ quest for intellectual independence than that of Edwin Heriot. Heriot noted that the shame of the South is that they have failed to utilize their resources to produce home textbooks and literature. Like Marshall, Heriot said North literature and schools book have been more favorable in the South than Southern literature and textbooks published in the South.

Speaking on the habits, Southerners, Heriot argued “we are sadly deficient in giving proper encouragement to Southern literature, no one reads the papers of the day can presume to doubt. Even in these times of threatened non-intercourse and abuse of Yankee notions, the praises of Northern books and periodicals are ringing through the

⁶⁴ Marshall, “Home Education at the South,” (May, 1855): 665-667.

⁶⁵ Marshall, 665.

⁶⁶ Marshall, 666.

columns of the press..."⁶⁷ Continuing he noted Southerners had a contradictory approach to Northern literature, "Harper's magazine' and Bonner's Ledger' are denounced one day as 'under the control of abolitionists,' and unfriendly to the institutions of the South, and the next day helps us as models of elegant literature, and superior to anything ever published."⁶⁸ Adding, he noted, "the same works, if issued from Charleston or Savannah would hardly pay the printer's bill. The Southern literary Messenger, Debow Review, and the field and fireside, are not considered worthy of a place beside these remarkably popular extensively circulated, and densely crowded repositories of flash romances and incendiary doctrines."⁶⁹ He conceded that the consistent neglect of general education had proved costly for the South in several ways.

All talk and no action

The problem with culture and habits were very overwhelming. Despite the energy, rhetoric, and conferences which induced the calls for home education, textbooks, educational reform, and publishing. Southerners were slow and unwilling to doing anything for these causes before the war amid what they saw as a significant threat of sectional tension. James Russell Lowell stated Southerners have barely moved to change the course of things on the matters of education or Southern textbooks. The author asked, "it is impossible to get Southern men to move in this matter? Must we forever take our school books, with all the bias which is given to them, in the hostile hands through which

⁶⁷ Heriot, "Educational Reform at the South."

⁶⁸ Heriot.

⁶⁹ Edwin Heriott, "Wants of the South," *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 29, no. 2 (August 1860): 215–23.

they pass to our children?"⁷⁰ Providing an example of inactivity, the author noted, as he traveled through Charleston, stopping at the Citadel to meet a Colonel Capers. During the visit, the author noticed that Colonel Capers taught out of Wilson's United States history textbook. The author noted the book was one of the less hostile books to the South, but instead of contemplating the outright rejection of the text, Lowell noted he realized that the instructor, "more than likely could not do any better but to use the work, for no useable work existed written and published in the South for school use."⁷¹

The discourse on education during sectional tension presents a useful key to the history on ideas of general education because the articulations of Southerners as they sought to defend themselves from Northern critiques and petition for greater investment in Southern educational institutions and Southern literature revealed the persistent neglect of the majority. It was evident in the discourse on education in relationship to developing educational institution in response to sectional tension maintain a focus on a few. For instance, the Southern defense against Northern critique defended often inflating the educational status of the South by focusing on the educational activities of the wealthy. Moreover, the conversation concerning educating Southerners in the South focused on bringing wealthy Southerners from Northern institutions and refining Southern institutions for wealthy students. In addition, the discussion on the need for Southern textbooks was in truth, a concern for the intellectual orientation of the wealthy and future leaders of the South. Without a background on the educational neglect of the

⁷⁰ James Russell Lowell, "Department of Education," *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 25, no. 3 (September 1858): 366–70.

⁷¹ Lowell, 370.

majority, the language of commentators, which had a “supposed concern for education in the South and Southerners” would not appear to be a focus on the wealthy but as illustrated that was the case. The gains made for popular education in the 1850s was the result of reformers and supporters continuing to battle to make popular education a reality. Nevertheless, it cannot be discounted nor underestimated the importance of educational discourse in response to sectional tension did for proliferation and the advancement of reformers arguments for popular educational during the 1850s

Chapter 5

The 1850s and a Renewed Campaign for Popular Education

Northerners critique of the South's intellectual culture, the Southern concern of the South lagging behind the North educationally, and the campaign for Southern intellectual independence because the fear of Northern domination of educational and intellectual enterprises were among the events that add to the changing climate in the Southern mind toward public education in the 1850s. Supporters of public education in the 1850s continued converse about many of the themes discussed in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s. However, the conversation in the 1850s needs to be set apart from the earlier decades because the 1850s witnessed a spike in popular education discourse; moreover, the 1850s represented a shift in momentum in the battle of popular education. Within this decade there was not only an escalation in general sentiments and zeal for popular education, but reformers decided to take a binary approach in the struggle to establish popular education. Discourse in the 1850s combined the technical problems of the Free School System with the cultural barriers to free schools in an attempt to loosen the ideological grip that bound the majority to the will of the few and lead to the failure of the Free School System.¹

¹ John Furman Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina* (State Company, 1925): 462.

Growth in the General Sentiments towards General Education

The growth in educational sentiments advanced because of various activities and thoughts of the 1850s. For instance, Historian J. Mills Thornton noted changing educational zeal in Alabama was a consequence of the states' economic prosperity, which resulted in a reassessment in the value of education. During the reassessment, Thornton noted, "Things which were earlier thought unimportant [such as popular education] seemed now to be significant."¹ Alabamians before the 1850s thought popular education of no value and useless; in fact, the majority denounced popular education because it was state sponsored. However, economic changes forced Alabamians to reconsider the importance of education among other things. As they reassessed their condition several Alabamians advocated for greater educational resources.² Thornton highlighted how educational arguments that relied on republican rhetoric and the belief that education was a need for republican government were not only reiterated in the 1850s but these arguments gained new listeners' and cultivated supporters that promoted a change in educational policy in Alabama.

The change in values and ideas carried Alabamians to witness some educational improvements. By the 1850s, J. Mills Thornton noted Alabamians observed an upsurge in the number of libraries and newspapers as well as growth of schools and school attendance. He noted, "it would appear that fully half of the state's potential school population was actually in school by the end of the antebellum era. The number of

¹ Tennessee General Assembly House of Representatives, *House Journal*, 1854.

² Ibid, 295. Use of market to support education see Charles Lee Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790-1840* (Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1908), 551-552.

schools, public and private, grew from some 750 in 1840 to about 1,300 in 1850, to 2,100 in 1860. It was the public school which accounted for most of this growth.”³

General growth of educational sentiments also stemmed from the election of Andrew Jackson. As a "self-made" man and a promoter of popular education, his election as president increased the attention on the importance of education. Although Andrew Jackson died in the 1840s, Governor Andrew Johnson from Jackson's home state of Tennessee reprimanded that state's General Assembly for the state's lack of schools, the inactivity of leaders, and the legislature of Tennessee to remedy failing school systems. Johnson wrote, "It must be apparent to all that our present system of common school education falls very far short of coming up to the imperative commands of the constitution. If the law establishing our system of common schools had been perfect in all its details, the common school fund has been heretofore wholly inadequate to put it into practical and efficient operation through the state." He continued, "the time has surely arrived when the legislature and the people should lay hold of this important subject with

³ Thornton, *Politics, and Power in a Slave Society*, 301. Despite the growth illiteracy rates in the state as a whole, the density created by more urban spaces helped the illiteracy rates per 1000 to decrease; Financing of the public school system by taxes and other public money, chiefly the sixteen section funds, grew by 360 percent. This enormous increase came primarily in response to the provisions of the Public Schools Act of 1854 and the Public Schools Amendments Act of 1856. The number of colleges in the state grew from two in 1840 and five in 1850 to seventeen in 1860. College income trebled in the fifties, though almost all of it continued to come from tuition charges." However, Thornwell did note that by 1859 their zeal seems to reverse, he noted, "Progress is in the eye of the beholder. The politicians' constant search for an issue with which to achieve office had combined with urban resentment of a government dominant by an alien outlook to give the state what it had never had, a centralized, state-supported public schools system. But the point is that the state at large not only had not had such a system; it had not really wanted one. The politicians quickly discovered that the issue aroused no great enthusiasm. It was not the bobby they sought, and they dropped it. By 1859 the governor, while recommending increased funds for a variety of state programs, was telling the legislature that additional appropriations for the schools would be 'inexpedient at this time.' Indeed, there was even a movement to abolish the state and county superintendencies. It is true, of course, that some townships had not maintained a school only because their sixteenth section income had been insufficient to finance one. But in most cases the citizens had simply failed to accept the notion that schooling would significantly benefit their children."

a strong and unfaltering hand. All very readily concur in the opinion that something ought to be done to promote the cause of education, and still there are no effective steps taken.”⁴

The increase in zeal for popular education was so outstanding some thought leaders should act at once to make use of the spirit. In fact, Dr. J. H. Thornwell of South Carolina, who once believed South Carolina lacked the energy, desire, and infrastructure for popular education by 1853, began to change his opinion and join supporters in calling for the amplification of the measures to reform the Free School System. He stated, "I sincerely hope that the legislature may be duly sensible of the delicate posture of this subject. To my mind, it is clear as the noonday sun...Now or never is the real state of the problem."⁵ As a close witness to the battle over educational policy and educational access, Thornwell, caught in the educational fervor of the 1850s, recommended to the state legislature respond to the urgency and need of popular education.

Thornwell attributed his change of heart to the increase appreciation, call, and new value placed on education by the general public; moreover, Thornwell admitted that the continued push by supporters began to bear fruit in the 1850s. Speaking on the changing disposition the masses towards education, Thornwell noted, "there was never a greater cry for schools, and at no period within recollection have such strenuous efforts been made to establish and support them." Being an eyewitness to the educational

⁴ Tennessee General Assembly House of Representatives, *House Journal*, (1854) 455-456. Janis Price Greenough and Berkeley University of California, *Resistance to the Institutionalization of Schooling in the Antebellum Southern Highlands*, 1999: 70-72.

⁵ J.H. Thornwell, "Dr. J.H. Letter to Governor Manning on Public Instruction in South Carolina," November 1853.

situation of South Carolina for over thirty years, Thornwell believed that such energy deserved attention and the state leaders should respond to the public want. He prophetically warned that if the legislative leaders did not respond to the desire for education in a timely manner the opportunity to educate Southerners would pass out of the hands of the state and into the hands of those who may not benefit the institutions of the state. Although he was speaking concerning sectarian education, when the republican government of reconstruction instituted a public schools system in 1868 that event fulfilled his prophecy.⁶

Col. F.W. Capers, of the State Military Institute of South Carolina also noticed the growth of zeal among the masses and the changing momentum in the educational battle. Echoing Thornwell, Capers thought it best for the leaders of the state to immediately put forth the effort to institute popular education while the people were ready and open to change. In hopes of making a change to the educational nerve of the state, Capers candidly urged the leaders of the state to stop sabotaging popular education. He suggested state leaders accomplished the sabotage goals by debating, comparing, and denouncing outside systems to dissuade the public and drain the enthusiasm of popular education. He encouraged the legislature to construct a general education policy that would be a natural outgrowth of South Carolina's society, that was "self-originating and self-sustaining."⁷

Another author urged for South Carolina legislators to act and ensure popular education for the masses, noting, "but we may express the hope that the legislature may

⁶ Thornwell.

⁷ James Russell Lowell, "Department of Education," *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress, and Resources*. 25, no. 3 (September 1858): 369.

commence the good work, at its approaching session, and that labor may never weary until it shall be said the system of free school is as perfect as human wisdom can render it, and not a white man, endowed with reasoning faculties, in South Carolina can be found who cannot read and write intelligently. Republicanism will find in such a state of things its strongest-popular rights their surest vindicator.”⁸ The hope of many supporters of general education was to win the ideological battles that would lead to the launch of a useful system of popular education.

Commentators and supporters undoubtedly felt the zeal of popular education and believed the window of opportunity to gain the heart of the popular mind and contort the will of leaders and force the formation of a useful system of schools had to happen in the 1850s. To influence the people and the leaders, supporters, and advocates discussed and addressed the ideological and practical problems of popular education that dissenters often use to wish away discourse on popular education.

Commentators and supporters used the momentum of the 1850s to go on the offensive in the battle for general education. They boldly pointed blame at ideas, persons, and subjects while simultaneously arguing for reform of the Free School System. As an example of finger pointing, one South Carolina author contended that the political speculation which often took the attention of the people away from matters of “practical utility” such as education must be overturned. The author insisted that politicians cease from lip service and false short excitement that often served to grab the heart of the people for a “momentary response.” It was time for more and demand more than good

⁸ “Public Schools,” *The Independent Press*, November 10, 1854.

feelings, the author noted, “But this is not what we want we do not desire to have this subject [general education] brought forth, again and again, to make merely a vain parade, or flourishing effort barren of good fruit. We desire that it shall be pressed home deep into the minds of the sober reflecting, wise men of the country that they may resolve the matter seriously and strike out some plan that will yield us all the benefits of which a good plan is capable.”⁹

Finger pointing continued in various spaces in the South. C.H. Wiley, the first Superintendent of North Carolina’s common schools appointed in the early 1850s, loathed the idea that it took his state decades to create an office of superintend, which was a position that he believed should have been one of the first offices created when the system of common schools was first erected. Wiley contended that the lack of accountability, responsibility, and the growth defects of popular education in North Carolina were all testaments that demonstrated the need for a governing head. He noted that since those in charge of the system lacked the wherewithal to create a chief director to ensure the efficiency of the system, and one dedicated to reporting the progress and defects, North Carolina had been “groping in the dark.”¹⁰ Wiley’s complaint is not only an example of finger pointing by placing the blame of ignorance on the shoulders of the North Carolina legislature but also an example of zeal and taking the battle to the dissenters of his state.

⁹ “State Affairs,” *The Camden Journal*, June 11, 1852.

¹⁰ “Address to the Officers of the Common Schools, and to the Friends of Education in North Carolina,” February 5, 1853.

Placing the blame for the lack of education on careless leadership proved to be a helpful strategy. Finger pointing not only became a rallying point for supporters to critique leadership, but it also drew in new commentators and supporters which give greater attention to past problems of and purpose remedies to the Free School System.

Part II.

General problems with education:

It is without question that commentators on popular education seeking to reform educational policy rode the energy surrounding the educational question in the 1850s to arrest and redress all hindrances to popular education. This is best understood through an individual examination of how advocates reevaluated the major obstacles facing popular education that in times past hindered the growth of general education. Supporters revisited ideas such as the role of the state and the problem of apathy. Their attempt to atone for past issues, but must also be viewed as a strategy of supporters attempting to beat back, pull down, and denounce arguments dissenters had use and continued to quietly used to ignore and denounce popular education prior to the 1850s

State Intervention:

Those seeking to establish popular education wanted in the 1850s to overturn the Southern perception of state influence. For instance, in South Carolina there existed great resistance to state influence on matters of education. The belief was maintained that if the government must be involved in matters of education, its influence should always remain small. This ideology limited the development of Free School System and effectively pauperized the few free schools in existence by making them objects of public contempt,

and general education a subject of contempt. As a result, these perceptions of free schools and the topic of general education supported the belief that state influence on popular education ought to be resisted, and, what is more, rejecting state intervention also encouraged defiance to the establishment of normal schools, which would have provided the state with a much-needed pool of teachers.

Supporters and commentators understood in the 1850s that to ensure "radical changes" and firmly entrench popular education in society, the state had to intervene. Bryan Clinche contended that only the state had the resources to train and hire the necessary teachers. Besides that, he continued, only the state had the resources to employ a superintendent or examiner to ascertain the present condition of public instruction. The state being the only apparatus that can guarantee the fulfillment of needs forced supporters, like Clinche, to develop a formidable approach to state intervention in hopes of overturning the mind of Southerners toward the belief that state intervention on matter of education was a positive commission.¹¹

By the 1850s the Free School System of South Carolina had evolved into a volunteer system, which was a mixture of state-supported "pauper" schools, private schools, and academies. In essence, it was a volunteer system that resembled a loose construction of independent functionaries that combined private and public funding. In other words, the Free School System was no system at all. Thornwell, a student of South Carolina's educational history and now an avid supporter of popular education noted that

¹¹ Bryan J Clinche, "Education in Missouri, Boston, Washington, South Carolina, Arkansas, Germany," *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 18, no. 2 (February 1855): 285–288.

the arguments that a centralized system dictated by the state could never work and would lead to an unprofitable educational system, which dissenters often used to denounce state intervention, was a false assertion. Thornwell contended that the independent functionary system promoted by dissenters as opposed to a state-run system had proved by its failure to achieve general education that the need for state intervention was imperative.

By emphasizing the failure of the volunteer system, in addition to comparing the South with the North and European nations, Thornwell wanted to prove the necessity of state intervention. Foreign systems like those in the North and Germany, which were fully state-sponsored had trained teachers, school buildings, resources and a society semi-committed to general education. Thornwell asked Southerners to compare and contrast foreign states to South Carolina, so that they may learn that the South as a whole could not compare to any foreign system of education because the South lacked buildings, support, trained teachers, and the apathy toward education abounded in great quantity.

Southern resistance to state influence on education, Thornwell believed, were founded on false beliefs promoted by those who desired to prevent the progress of popular education (which was a strategy that worked.) Thornwell noted it was believed and promoted that a system without state influence would allow competition to flourish and swell the number of schools. However, Thornwell insisted that the plan to use competition as a method to grow popular education had long failed. To Thornwell, the only way to educate and overcome the failures and obstacles of the Free School System was to reject market principles and accept state intervention because “the state is precisely the agent with whom this power should be lodged. Its influence, when

judiciously put forth carries a weight, which ignorance and prejudice cannot finally withstand. It can embody the wisdom of all, and, by its pervading organizations, diffuse the life, spirit, and intelligence which anywhere exist into all parts.”¹²

Complementing the argument for state intervention, Austin Hagerman requested South Carolina’s leaders to embrace a state-run education system because the state government could visibly accomplish what the loose voluntary system could never accomplish, which was to provide accountability and responsibility for general education. Hagerman noted, "under the present plan "[volunteer system]" we have poor teachers, because no one is responsible for giving us better; wretched school-houses, because it is no one's business to give us good ones; and miserable text-books, because it is neither the duty nor the interest of anyone to provide better. Improvements have never taken place anywhere, steadily, and consistently except as the result of division of labor, and consequent responsibility, imposed by the state."¹³ Thornwell and Hagerman’s words may seem as if they do not have any political thrust to them, but they do. By supporting state intervention, they dished out a direct assault on the status quo and the aims of dissenters who hoped to keep the state from taking part in managing a well organized and expansive system of public education.

There were others in South Carolina that also believed the fate of popular education resided with the actions of the state and a report from the South Carolina legislature in 1855 suggested as much. The writer of the report argued that to resolve the

¹² Ibid, 423.

¹³ Austin Q. Hagerman, “Free School System of South Carolina,” *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 2, no. 1 (November 1856): 125–60.

obstacles of popular education was to fully commit to the Free School Act of 1811.¹⁴ Education should, as the author suggested, create its own demand and supply and the accomplishment of supply was written into the Free School Act of 1811 which not only provide legal authority to grow a public school system but also ordained that the state have complete oversight over the system adopted.¹⁵ By arguing that state leaders needed to return to the Free School Act of 1811, the commentator suggested the cause of popular education had not only strayed from the goals of 1811, but those who had previously charged over the state government neglected their duties by not carrying out the law as intended.

Those who continued to argue for state intervention, looked for above all things to answer the question of responsibility. Who was responsible for the education of the children of the state? Traditional thought maintained that the education of an individual remained the individual's responsibility. Instead of arguing against the status quo, tradition, and customs with new arguments, supporters in the 1850s began to argue that the question of responsibility for general education was resolved in 1811 when state leaders appointed the state responsible for popular education. Commentators and supporters of education increasingly referred to the Free School Act of 1811 to show that state law had already placed the state accountable for public education. They contended that if the Free School Act of 1811 had failed, it failed because state leaders failed to follow the law.

¹⁴South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina* (State Printer, 1855). Robert Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc*, 1837.

¹⁵ Carolina.

Advocates consistently reiterated that because the Free School Act of 1811 was never enforced as intended, those who questioned state intervention had effectively blocked the growth of the Free School System. Nevertheless, by 1850, commentators had recognized how the question of state intervention in matters of education had for several decades created much confusion and left countless whites without the right to education granted to them by the state. For instance, Austin Hagerman noted, the problem and question of state intervention “has been no imaginary impediment; it blocked the wheels of improvement in 1839, in 1853, and will continue to block them until the question is settled.”¹⁶ By arguing that the Free School Act of 1811 provided had long resolved the question of state intervention, Hagerman desired for leaders and readers to confront the importance of Free School Act of 1811 and reconsider the role and objectives of state leaders who neglected to carry out the system to its broadest extent as read in the law.

Taking on apathy

The pervasive spirit of apathy which hindered popular education in the early antebellum period was also targeted by commentators and supporters who hoped the zeal of the 1850s would allow them to substitute apathy with commitment. Their strategy was to explain the origins and cause of apathy toward popular education. For example, in South Carolina, C.G. Memminger, the leader of the school system in Charleston, explained the failure of the Free School System was the major reason why apathy existed in South Carolina. When developing plans of the Free School System, Memminger contended, developers suffered from biting off more than they could chew and loss of the

¹⁶ Hagerman, “Free School System of South Carolina,” 132.

enthusiasm. Thus, the consistent failures of the Free School System killed the hope of general education for South Carolina citizenry. The better idea of creating a system of public education must start slowly. He noted, "If instead, of attempting to educate at once every part of every district we were to commence with the most populous part of each [district] gradually extend the field of improvement from these centres."¹⁷ To mend the problem of overextension, at least in strategy, he suggested that state leaders build popular education in increments and allow it to balloon into a complete system.

Memminger's plan for overcoming apathy focused not only on growing schools incrementally but also growing the school population incrementally. He believed the proliferating presence of teachers and schools in the local community would trigger the natural mimicry and curiosity spirit that existed with in human beings, and he believed the presence of good schools and teachers would rapidly increase the attendance of free schools. The benefits of such schools would become so apparent that every portion of the district that would combine for the same purposes would soon follow the example."¹⁸ Memminger argued that if there was a way to grow and develop of schools and overcome apathy, the path would develop a learning culture that included teachers, good schools that consistently demonstrated to passersby the visible benefits of education. He believed

¹⁷ "Free Schools," *Edgefield Advertiser*, September 1855.

¹⁸ "Free Schools." To fulfill the need of teachers, which were in great shortage in South Carolina and the entire South, he also called for the establishment of a normal school in either Charleston or Columbia provided by the state, which would not only ensure the preparedness of teachers but ensure they are contracted for a set amount of years to service in district schools. Memminger believed the long-standing power of apathy needed to be met the resistance of a learning culture.

that once a culture of education was rightly planted, the apathy that existed would naturally disappear.¹⁹

Like C.G. Memminger of South Carolina, C.H. Wiley of North Carolina also believed developing a culture of education was key to overcoming apathy. For Wiley, the apathetic attitudes towards general education resulted from cultural perceptions and class ideas. Wiley believed the wealthy not only had great influence over society perceptions but also intentionally devalued common schools by not sending their children to those schools and by not participating in the governing of common schools. He noted, "if they [the wealthy] make it appear that the Common Schools are things in which they have no direct personal interest and that they desire their success only for the sake of their poorer neighbors, their course will not certainly be productive of good to the schools."²⁰ Wiley believed that if the rich valued common schools, others classes would also begin to value them, which would not only spread the desire for knowledge but also provide the much need attention to ensure a more efficient school system. Wiley suggested that through the proper support of all classes common schools could become a holy institution where all the interests of the state came together.²¹

¹⁹ Memminger's plan paralleled the intentions of the free school act of 1811. For the framers, who sought for gradual development of a school system. He also proposed that South Carolina leaders produce more teachers and strategically "raise up teachers from each neighborhood, who could be employed in the more sparse and destitute neighborhoods. Suppose, for instance, there were good schools at Greenville and Spartanburg, at which every child within an area of three miles could be taught such Schools would not only prove centres of light in each of these districts but would enable each of these villages of furnish teachers for the whole or part of the year, to every part of the district, at cheaper rates and with more certainty than when teachers were drawn from a distance."

²⁰ "Address to the Officers of the Common Schools, and to the Friends of Education in North Carolina."

²¹ Ibid.

In addition to eliminating or minimizing class differences as a remedy for apathy, Wiley believed that the common schools needed to become the central point of community meetings and social activity. He contended schools would become new cultural symbols where individualism, privatism, and selfish ambitions could not enter. Once the common schools occupied a central geographical location in a community, Wiley imagined their presence would allow schools to not only serve as a place where knowledge was diffused but also serve as consistent mental reminders of the organization and unity necessary to progress as a society. Wiley felt this preoccupation of education would help schools become the attention of all classes, aid in allowing every person to see their future in the community's intellectual well-being, which would dissolve apathy that had long existed.²²

Memminger and Wiley's strategies sought to capitalize on the zeal of the 1850s to not only overcome apathy but also churn the status quo to the point that it defended the right to an education. They desired to create a new status quo which identify anyone that stood against general education as an enemy to the people. Their strategy wanted to force dissenters to either conform to a new standard which meant accepting general education as a right or face popular criticism.

Rethinking Republicanism

If supporters of popular education were to clear a path for the potential success of a Free School System, they had to wrestle with the dominating ideology of republicanism. Reformers had to develop arguments and strategies that would

²² Ibid.

reconfigure republican ideology that fully embraced popular education without contradicting the habits, maxims, and manners of all classes. In other words, advocates of general education had to reorganize the taste of the public to accept a new form of republican ideology.

One author in the *Southern Literary Messenger* proclaimed that the brand of republicanism that existed in the South during the antebellum period harmed the Southern mind because it blinded Southerners' to their own needs and problems. The author wrote, "The fact of the business is, in the way of general culture, our Southern states generally are not abreast of the major part of those other civilized state whom we consider our peers. The great duty of these Southern states is to stop talking and to go to acting. If we cherish any illusions with regard to our self-sufficiency, it will not harm us when they are dissipated. Or if we are conscious of any deficiencies it is our duty to have them remedied. There is a foolish soreness in our Southern fancies about having any blemish pointed out in our society, which is absolutely childish."²³ To the author, the Southern response to general education demonstrated that Southerners had misplaced, misunderstood, or abided by the wrong concept of republicanism. Southern republican ideology as practice, the author argued, had sustained itself through false conservative principles which consistently denounced popular education and failed to benefit the majority. The republicanism practiced was "The very worst state of mind" because it was too proud, and "A man of this sort, in his arrogant spirit, cannot learn."²⁴

²³ Charlotte McIvaine Moore, "The University: Its Character and Its Wants, Part I, *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts* Volume 22, Issue 4, (April 1856): 241-269..

²⁴ Ibid, 243.

The author did not disagree with Southern society and its culture but argued that the South boasted of its society and culture without cause and had no evidence to uphold the claim that the South was a great society. The author asked, how could the South boast? when the majority of its citizens were gripped by dense ignorance, and when Southern society lacked education and lacked cultural depth? Critical of the South and its false romance with itself, the author asked, "Where are fine arts? Where is our music? Where are our pictures? Where are our sculptures?"²⁵ The problem with the South and its inability to see and make the necessary changes were shortcomings of Southern society.

The author thought this was the result of a badly designed and stubborn form of republican ideology. Republican tradition which prided itself on little to no change and self-sufficiency created a clumsy and erroneous stronghold in the Southern mind. Ironically, education and internal improvements were the very things that could save the Southern mind from itself, and more, the author contended; the very things republicanism shunned. To reverse the course of self-decay, the writer called for the reassessment of republican ideology, one that included the education of all Southerners.

Others in the 1850s also realized the dilemma and the problem republicanism posed to Southern society, particularly how republicanism was an impediment in the assembly of a useful system of education. To many commentators, republicanism had to be critiqued, reconsidered, and eventually reconfigured if general education would have a chance to work.

²⁵ Ibid, 243.

The problem of individualism

In urging the South to develop popular education, James Bruce contended the South first had to develop its resources and suffocate certain ideologies and habits, particularly individualism propagated by a fork tongued ruling class. Bruce cited individualism for bolstering the erroneous and fabricated beliefs in ideas such as the "self-made man" and "trickle-down" education, both which he thought were impediments to popular education. Trickle down education which embraced the idea that only those who could afford schooling should be educated and if the state aided in the education of citizens, the state should focus most of its attention on those who could afford knowledge. The concept of trickle down education maintained that if the few were educated, they through service to the state and being in the presence of uneducated people would spread their knowledge to the uneducated and render a service to society.

Bruce criticized the trickle-down concept as highly individualized and false. He noted that the majority did not spend enough time around "educated" people to become enlightened by their education. Also, if the majority of the people failed to occupy spaces where the educated congregated, how was a "self-made man" supposed to develop? Bruce noted that in every instance where a man rose above his station, pursued education, and gained a higher societal status it was the result of interacting with educated people and gaining help through some apparatus or individual. Bruce argued that the truth of Southern education was that the rulers and the influential never intended to educate the

majority.²⁶ Reversing the republican consciousness was critical for supporters and those like James Bruce attempted to show consequences of the prevailing republican mentality of the antebellum South.

Bruce urged the people to discard the republican philosophy of the "self-made man," because it often wrongly persuaded the majority to reject ideas like popular education without forethought. Bruce contended that it was the majority who accepted the republican ideological branch of individualism which exalted the empty "self-made man" philosophy. Bruce contended that the majority was being hustled into accepting ideologies that did more harm to their own interests than good. He insisted that such thoughts and philosophies always had their origins with the wealthy, which they wielded as a tactic to keep the masses ignorant. These philosophies were the residue of a secret, ancient, and ongoing war "by knowledge on ignorance, by the enlightened and of the unscrupulous few on the ignorant and laboring many."²⁷ Not only that, he noted that the plan was succeeding because the war over popular education and knowledge remained unperceived. The obliviousness on the part of the ignorant majority not only pushed the masses behind but assisted in the educated hegemonic practices which were inspired by a corrupted brand of republicanism.

The ideology of republicanism guided Southerners' perceptions of state spending. Unfortunately, republican ideology as practiced in the South did not support spending

²⁶ James C. Bruce, "Popular Knowledge: The Necessity of Popular Government, a Lecture," *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 19, no. 5 (1836): 297.

²⁷ Ibid, 297. Robert Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc*, 1837, Wickliffe argued, "it is time for those who think that every man in the common wealth is both able and willing to educate his own children, to be convinced of their mistake, and to join the friends of learning in one common and united effort for the diffusion of popular knowledge." (6)

public money for popular education. One author noticed that through republicanism, public funds were often viewed in the same manner as private funds. Thus, taxes which were collected by the state treasury were viewed not as a public pool for purposes of sustaining the government, and public works and services but as a private funds belonging to individuals of the state. To spend public money indiscriminately was perceived as criminal, tyrannical, a violation of republicanism and by consequence a route to oppression and slavery. The best way to not violate this custom and conform to the standard of republican ideology was by not spending public money. Austin Hagerman contended that Southerners had a holy horror of anything that involved the expenditure of public money, “and nothing but the sternest plea of necessity can ever justify the slightest approximation to the tyranny of new appropriations.”²⁸ The attitude which considered public funds as a private treasure that needed to be protected created the reluctance to spend public funds, at least on disapproving works, outside of an emergency. Such a philosophy proved greatly beneficial to dissenters of popular education; in fact, Hagerman argued that because of republican ideology dissenters were able to denounce public education because it would most certainly require taxes and public spending.

Austin Hagerman thought the Southern philosophy of republican ideology a wise conception had leaders practice republicanism in the right spirit. Hagerman contended South Carolina leaders corrupted republicanism. He argued that republican ideology rightly guided the mind of the leaders to take care of the public funds, but they failed to do so sagaciously. Hagerman reasoned that republicanism had not only allotted the use of

²⁸ Hagerman, “Free School System of South Carolina,” 128.

public money for public services in times of emergency but demanded, as the correct republican action, that public money must be used during times of emergency. Thus, Hagerman argued that if public funds should be used during times of emergency, then state leaders had consistently failed to carry out the republican principle when the majority needed. During emergencies such as the need to improve roads and develop an efficient system of education, Hagerman contended, the legislatures often decided to relegate those emergencies to future generations.

Hagerman noted the when state leaders used republican rhetoric and claimed to protect the public purse and the pockets of citizens, in all actuality state leaders were looking out for "their own personal promotion" while manipulating the public mind and to gain control over the public purse.

To Hagerman, republican ideology as practiced in South Carolina was a trap and snare set by the wealthy to capture the majority's heart and mind and bend it to their wills. Hagerman stated it this way, "It is these vile demagogues, who, by taking advantage of natural prudence, create the difficulty; and, when they have made it, use it as an instrument of power."²⁹ Further critiquing state leaders he noted they "care nothing for the people, or the treasury-they think only of themselves; and whenever a policy too broad for their limited vision, too liberal for their selfish aims, and too pure for their corrupt principles, is proposed by the real friends of popular improvement, these harpies at once undertake to defile it by their foul insinuations, and under the specious pretense of

²⁹ Ibid, 129.

frugality and economy, to render it odious to the public mind.”³⁰ To Hagerman public spending filtered through republican ideology, as expressed by the leaders of the South, required a reconfiguration before a system of public education could exist.

Reconfiguring Republican Ideology

Others also found republican ideology in need of reform but not as an entire ideology but rather in emotions. One writer noted the discourse of popular education in the past decades required those who wanted to extend the benefits of education to adhere to republican ideology that held public education as a poor institution. Republican ideology made it so that “Many are unwilling to admit that they are ignorant [and impoverished] ...among a population strongly imbued with republican feelings, none but the actually infamous were willing to answer to the appellation of [being] common, as implying inferiority in claims to respectability... And if we send to the common schools, said the people, we admit this reproach of inferiority on ourselves and on our children; we help to drive our offspring into the fold where they are to be a need off from the aristocracy of the country, and to receive a mark that is to distinguish them for life as common, inferior people.”³¹ By yielding to these feelings, supporters of the past had often failed to adjust republicanism to fit the idea, habits, and perceptions of the white majority.

In fact, for the majority of the antebellum period the disassociation of popular education with republican tenets had haphazardly led the majority to believe that

³⁰ Ibid, 129. Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina*.

³¹ “Common Schools,” *The North Carolina Standard*, October 12, 1853..

shunning popular education that was a fulfillment republican ideology. C.H. Wiley of North Carolina commented on how refusing common schools fulfilled republican ideologies. He stated “With such notions [republican ideology] prevailing as to the meaning of Common Schools, and as to their object [education of the poor], the utter failure of such a system would be a source of gratifications to the republican; it would indicate a feeling of self-respect essential to the existence of a government professing to be found on the popular will.”³²

Republicanism was an apparent obstacle to popular education, and some commentators provided conceptual frameworks for reconfiguring republican ideology to make it compatible with general education. The educational ‘philosopher’ Austin Hagerman suggested making popular education a “universal obligation.” By this, he desired for the majority to perceive education as a family, state, individual, and church obligation. Revolting against the old republican ideology feelings which deemed education an individual chore, Hagerman contended, education belonged to all-to the South holistically, belonging “to parents, to citizens, to the church, to the state, each in its several spheres not exclusively to one, least of all, exclusively to the church or the state.”³³ Adding, Hagerman noted, “parents may educate their children in their own chosen way. The church, or any branch of it, may have their own schools and colleges.

³² “Common Schools C.H. Wiley,” *The North Carolina Standard*, October 12, 1853.

³³ Austin Q. Hagerman, “The Free Schools and University of Virginia,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 20, no. 2 (1854): 66.

Towns, corporations, neighborhoods, may employ their own teachers and regulate their own educational systems.”³⁴

By taking republican ideology which deemed education as an individual chore to a republicanism that focused on education as a “universal obligation,” Hagerman endeavored to tackle a major stumbling block to education. Seeking to guarantee that all hands were on deck to aid popular education through a new republican ideology, Hagerman desired to make education a communal chore which would make individual efforts a stigma, anti-republican, abnormal, and dishonorable. In other words, the author strove to reframe popular education to fulfill a new republican dogma that placed more emphasis on communalism which glorified communal actions as signs of liberty and honor.

Part III.

Tucker’s Bill and Essay

The zeal for education and the growth of educational discourse throughout the 1830s and 1840s pushed the popular education question to a pinnacle in the 1850s. By 1850s the collective sentiments of reformers, advocates, and commentators and the growth of educational zeal for popular education is best personified by Joseph Tucker’s commitment to the reorganization and improvement of South Carolina’s Free School System and his comments on the status of popular education in South Carolina. Tucker defended the idea of popular education and like many commentators, advocates, and

³⁴ Ibid, 67. James G. (James Gordon) Carter, *Essays upon Popular Education: Containing a Particular Examination of the Schools of Massachusetts, and an Outline of an Institution for the Education of Teachers* (Boston : Bowles & Dearborn, 1826): 8.

reformers of the 1850s he believed that most, if not all, of the obstacles that hindered the Free School System were surmountable. In lockstep with the mood of the times, Tucker criticized the leaders of education who he believed governed the state's educational philosophies with class principles and prejudices that hindered educational growth.

Tucker's petition and defense of popular education began with his protection of a bill that called for the reorganization and improvement of the Free School System. The bill was first introduced in South Carolina legislature in late 1854. The precise provisions of the bill are lost to history; however, some resolutions were preserved in articles from local newspapers. The bill called for a superintendent to oversee the common school system, and an increase of the annual appropriation of \$100,000 to be distributed among the districts, according to the number of whites, not representation.³⁵ The bill also called for a direct tax to help support the schools, better reporting and records of the schools, and also called for a Board of Directors in each election district and authorize the same board to divide their districts into sections and establish a common school in district centers.

The legislature postponed the debate on the bill in December 1854, and it became the first order of business when the legislature convened in 1855.³⁶ When the legislature began its session in late in 1855 three bills on education were discussed, the first of the three was the Tucker advocated bill to "the improvement of the free school system in

³⁵ Bruce W. Eelman, "'An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved': The Struggle for Common Schools in Antebellum Spartanburg, South Carolina," *History of Education Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2004): 265.; J. Isaac Copeland, "The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868," (1957): 230.

³⁶ Copeland, "The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868," 236.

South Carolina." During the legislative session, the bill fell under criticism. The call for an office of superintendent faced the sharpest critique. Perry E. Duncan rejected the appointment of a superintendent, detailed logging of students' information by commissioners, and a direct tax. James D. Blanding of Sumter supported Duncan in rejecting the appointment of a superintendent and direct tax.. Eventually, the State House of Representatives tabled the bill, which effectually killed the bill. However, to appease the voices of educational supporters, a resolution was passed to increase the annual appropriation for free schools from \$37,000 to \$74,000.³⁷ Without a superintendent, equitable distribution of the free school funds, a direct tax to raise money for the school fund and to sustain free schools, and create greater accountability of the free schools, the Free School System would continue as an unproductive institution.

The bill "to improve the free school system of South Carolina" which came to be known as "Tucker's bill" is only a modicum of what Tucker desired, thought, and believed concerning popular education in South Carolina. Although we do not know much about the provisions of the bill, however, Tucker's essay on the defense of the "Bill to Organize a System of Common Schools" was printed in full in the *Lancaster Ledger* in March 1854. His essay provided readers an in-depth look into his views on popular education. The ideas of Tucker are imperative to mention because they best reflect and capture the zeal for popular education in the 1850s and the action reformers were taking to establish an efficient school system for the majority. More significantly, Tucker's essay addressed the educational and class inequalities that laid at the center of the

³⁷ Ibid, 236.

struggle of the Free School System in South Carolina. It is also significant to comprehend how reformers perceived dissenting arguments and the presence of educational inequality.

Tucker began his essay by critiquing the historical trajectory of education in South Carolina since the 1811 Free School Act. He contended that the conversation on popular education had always met the same ends, consisting of the lack of duty and laziness. For example, when the conversation of popular education had aroused at various times with great attention from the public. Instead of responding to the public's energy for education, Tucker argued, state leaders responded with a few “kind” gestures, such as punishing of a few irresponsible commissioners or adding to the appropriation. But the “kind” gestures of the state leaders Tucker found inadequate to the needs of the state. He stated, “we have been accustomed to acquit ourselves of duty, and to satisfy our conscience by the enunciations of a few general propositions—a set of truisms, about which there can be no controversy, while the great truth contained in our admissions remains un-worked-out and un-applied by us to the common interests and practical wants.”³⁸ He believed the response of the state leaders to the need of general education led to a disheartening pattern of neglect.

The criticism of Tucker continued while hoping to bruise the ego of his fellow statesmen. Tucker argued that by measuring the efforts and suppose accomplishments of the South Carolina legislature in matters of education, it would be easy to conclude that South Carolina leaders operated society akin to European despotic aristocracy because

³⁸ “Speech of J. Wofford Tucker of Spartanburg on a Bill to Organize a System of Commons. Delivered in House of Representatives,” *The Lancaster Ledger*, March 1854.

South Carolina refused to educate their majority in order to rule over them by fear and ignorance.³⁹

Indicting South Carolina's government as a hidden aristocrat was not mere mudslinging. Tucker wanted to prove his assertions by detailing how the rejection of the Free School System followed the program of aristocratic societies. As an example, Tucker asked his readers to examine the difference between the state college and the Free School System. The college did not meet with the same end as the Free School System despite being funded by the same agency. For Tucker, the lopsided and hypocritical protection of South Carolina College over the free schools reflected the aristocratic mindset of the state leaders.

Tucker was not opposed to the state college; in fact, he argued that the college was a necessary institution. But he contended that a college which served the few is not a complete system of education, especially when education for the majority was neglected. He noted, "perhaps a hundred young Carolinians may have been in process of training for greatness and usefulness [at South Carolina college]; while forty thousand young Carolinians have, from therefore of circumstances been unable to avail themselves of those advantages; and perhaps one-third of that number have been denied the benefits of the plainest and commonest English education, for want of an efficient system of popular schools."⁴⁰ Tucker saw the neglect of the white majority as the work and fruit of an unjust aristocratic government.

³⁹ "Speech of J. Wofford Tucker of Spartanburg on a Bill to Organize a System of Commons. Delivered in House of Representatives."

⁴⁰ Ibid

Directly expressing his frustration on the neglect of the poor and less wealthy by state leaders, Tucker noted, "The subjects of education to whom I mean to refer you, and in whom I desire to interest this assembly, are not abstract boys and girls, ranged numerically on paper; but they are existing, acting, living, playing boys and girls: and 'fighting, crying, ragged, dirty Godless boys and girls, which swarm even in the streets of our towns and cities, as well as in the sand hills and mountains. And yet upon these, within certain limits, depend the destinies of the state. Aye, turn and twist it as you may, to this conclusion we must come at last; the security of property and the maintenance of our institutions are in their hands! And, where, by our one college, and no common school arrangement, we may have one individual highly educated, we have twenty wholly uneducated; and while the fundamental principle of our theory government is that the people govern."⁴¹ The unequal treatment of the poorer classes in the matter of education was at the heart of Tucker's speech. Tucker insisted that he did not seek to arouse class tension but what he saw as deliberate neglect of the education of the majority by leaders and the wealthy could not go unsaid.

To further his case of neglect and unfairness, Tucker referenced the free school fund distribution practices. He viewed the distribution of the free school fund as a gross injustice. The school fund, for the majority of the antebellum period, was distributed according to representation which provided wealthier sections of the state with more resources and funds to establish schools or use the money to enroll children into private academies where no free school existed. He noted the free school fund must be

⁴¹ "Speech of J. Wofford Tucker of Spartanburg on a Bill to Organize a System of Commons. Delivered in House of Representatives."

distributed according the white population, " which is an appropriation out of the treasury of the state, to the poor of the state. It is not intended to be given back to tax-payers; nor to districts; nor to any particular localities; but to the people of the state to aid in the education of the humbler classes. And why an arbitrary rule [distribution per representation], which has no foundation in the justice...of myself, I cannot tell."⁴²

Tucker desired a complete change to the system of popular education. He noted that after forty years of error and inefficiency, it is time for the state, out of moral necessity, to construct a system that is wholly beneficial to the entire population. Throughout the existence of the Free School System, there had been no noteworthy accomplishments beyond the fact of paying illiterate and incompetent teachers.⁴³

Tucker did not leave his desires for a greater and more equitable system of popular education to fall into a revolving door of debates and excuses as to why a better system could not exist but provided recommendations. Tucker contended that South Carolina should copy the school system of Maine because Maine's school system exceeded South Carolina's in efficiency and organization, dedicated more than three times the amount of money to the annual appropriation in comparison to South Carolina, the school system had an office of superintendent, and also ensured by law that all teachers were approved by the superintendent. By adopting a similar plan to Maine, Tucker felt a system for the education was more than achievable.

⁴² "Speech of J. Wofford Tucker of Spartanburg on a Bill to Organize a System of Commons. Delivered in House of Representatives."

⁴³ "Speech of J. Wofford Tucker of Spartanburg on a Bill to Organize a System of Commons. Delivered in House of Representatives."

Nevertheless, foreseeing, the often-repeated argument that Southern states could not replicate nor be compared to Northern states because Northern states did not have to contend with the obstacle of a scatter population, Tucker developed a counter-argument in order to forge an attack on the well-established Southern "excuse" of the inability to overcome the scattered population.

To make his point that South Carolina could do more to overcome the scattered population, Tucker asked his audience to ponder the popular education endeavors of Louisiana. Louisiana was a Southern state, with a sizable population, a scattered white population, with the added disadvantage of having a white population that spoke French and English. Tucker, speaking on the educational differences between South Carolina and Louisiana, noted, "Here then is a Southern state, with homogenous institutions, grappling with far greater difficulties than any with which we have to contend. Louisiana, them operating the same system which has proved so successful in Maine and other State expends \$330,000 per annum, in sustaining 1000 well organized common schools, containing over 60,000 scholars. How will the account stand in comparison between the country of the Rutledge's and Pickney's, and the land of Livingston? We fear the Chivalry must be put to the blush!"⁴⁴ Tucker saw the obstacle of the dispersed population as a fabricated excuse and in the 1850s that excuse failed to explain how a common school system had formed in Louisiana. Tucker noted common sense always proved that "one practically experimental fact is worth a thousand speculations. The objection [the

⁴⁴ "Speech of J. Wofford Tucker of Spartanburg on a Bill to Organize a System of Commons. Delivered in House of Representatives."

obstacle of a scatter population] is ill-founded: whenever schools can exist, the sub-division into sections is practicable."⁴⁵

In closing Tucker contended his call for improvement was a call for the common school system, whole and beneficial to all, and not the continuity of a poor Free School System nor trickled down education.⁴⁶ He concluded with sharing his sentiments on the importance of the education of the majority within a republican government. He stated, "This is not the faith in which we were brought up! - This is not the entertainment of which freemen have been invited! Our is a government of the people, or it is a profession of damnably falsehood; and when we neglect their real and substantial interests, we prevent the power which the people confer; and betray the trust which the people repose;" to neglect education within a republican government, "would give it the lie to our democratic theory of government; and brand all our republican struggles and achievements as manifestations of a wild and fruitless delusion!...my confidence, and my sympathies are not with the 'privileged few.' My faith rests with the common mind-with the common people...those neglected and despised classes are capable of thought-of judgment-of government; and in spite of all adverse theorizing, there can be no limitation to their progress and perfectibility."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "Speech of J. Wofford Tucker of Spartanburg on a Bill to Organize a System of Commons. Delivered in House of Representatives." Mercer, Society, and Society, *A Discourse on Popular Education*, 60-62. Counter to Tucker's essay see E. N. Elliott et al., *Cotton Is King, and pro-Slavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, String fellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on This Important Subject* (Augusta, Ga., Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 895-896.

⁴⁶ "Speech of J. Wofford Tucker of Spartanburg on a Bill to Organize a System of Commons. Delivered in House of Representatives. Eelman, Bruce W. 2004. "An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved": The Struggle for Common Schools in Antebellum Spartanburg, South Carolina." *History of Education Quarterly*. 44, no. 2: 265-267.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 265-267.

Tucker discussed the class ideologies that drove the idea of popular education into a poor situation. He wrestled, though cautiously, with the powers behind the manipulators of the popular mind and attempted to manifest their hypocrisies. Tucker explained how aristocratic rule played an enormous role in the neglect of popular education. He made clear how the aristocratic tendencies of South Carolina leaders prevented the expansion of educational opportunities to educate the majority and the opportunities that did exist were few and deficient. Tucker believed that lack of educational opportunities was an injustice to society. Tucker's desire for South Carolina to birth a useful school system not only demonstrated the momentum gained by supporters and their willingness to address what they viewed as the origins to the problems of popular education but his essay also personified the battle over popular education between reformers and dissenters. Lastly, his report illuminated that the commitment to the education of the majority by those in South Carolina was in no small measure and Tucker's bill and his essay in defense and for popular education is a glowing example.

Chapter 6

Dissenters Express Disdain for Popular Education

In the 1850s, South Carolina saw greater attention on the education question than any other time during the antebellum period. As the decade attracted greater zeal, especially from persons like Joseph Tucker who placed education and the ideas of Southern hegemony at the forefront of the conversation aroused dissenters to express their ideas on general education.¹ For instance, Tucker's essay, which blamed the aristocratic tendencies of South Carolina leaders for denouncing and blocking creation of a public education system seemed to have struck a nerve with dissenters and resultantly they emerged from the shadows to address their stance. William B. Taber commencement address in 1854 is a great example of dissenters' opinions on popular education.

Taber detested the common school system in the North and unlike Tucker, he believed South Carolina should in no wise follow. The Northern system created tension, promoted radicalism, and instigated class conflict. Taber interpreted the educational policy in the North as a promoter of "isms" (various ideologies) that could not be replicated in the South without arousing conflict with Southern society and her institutions. It made little sense for South Carolina or any Southern state to consider any

system of education that birthed social disorders. Instead of common schools, in keeping with the dissenters' tradition, Taber, believed a small group of educated persons should lead and enlighten the majority in order to direct the public mind aright. Taber contended that leisure was the only way to obtain a true education, and the slave society had only permitted a small leisure class to obtain knowledge. He fundamentally in the “theory of the leisure class,” believing that labor and education could not go together and they who were able to minimize their labor had the capacity and right to direct labor, shape the public mind, and refine society.¹

Taber, like much of the Southern ruling class, possessed a sharp class model for education. The education of lower classes, in Taber's belief, held the potential of corrupting and disrupting Southern society. The mental development of the majority was synonymous with the development of an educated discontented majority with the mental power to rebel. Taber fully articulated what he saw as the benefits of an ignorant majority. “Turn then to the South. See what grand part her menial class performs in social and political development. True, their voices are not heard in drunken shouts in our public meetings and the galleries of our legislature, cheering on the demagogue. They cannot exercise the so-called freeman’s birthright and vote down law, property, and God, and vote up anarchy, robbery, and the devil. They cannot read nor write and thus become no wiser, if no worse.”² He noted, ignorance and the withholding of knowledge from the lower class allowed menial classes to be serviceable to society because without education

¹ F. A. P., “Common Schools in South Carolina. By W. R. Taber and J. H. Thornwell,” *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 9, no. 18 (April 1854): 470–86. “Major B.F. Perry’s Criticism upon Mr. Taber’s Address,” *The Sumter Banner*, February 15, 1854.

² “Major B.F. Perry’s Criticism upon Mr. Taber’s Address.”

the mind of the lower class was not subject to the isms taught in the Northern school system.

Attempting not to rub his audience the wrong way, Taber, noted he was not against popular education but preferred that education be efficient and beyond the bare minimum that Southern reformers had promoted by insisting the South adopt Northern school models. He contended that the low standards of education in Northern common schools was the reason why the Northern school produced “rowdiness.” Tabor strongly believed that anything that resembled the Northern model of education was simultaneously the promotion of crime, vice, anti-republicanism and anti-conservatism values.

It was not only the standard of education that caused Taber to fear the diffusion of knowledge but also his beliefs that general education was a symbol of rebellion against natural order and natural law. By suggesting that popular education was unnatural, he argued that popular education was not necessary but if provided not only would the ruling class fight against it, but nature would also fight against popular education and restore the lower class to their rightful place as followers of the ruling class. Taber put it this way, “By the operation of immutable laws, which neither the violence of revolution nor the efforts of reform can effect, society everywhere is split into extreme divisions of wealth and leisure, poverty and dependence. The life of the latter is of necessity menial, and in communities where they do not fall under a superior race; they constitute that turbulent, corrupt pauper host which looms in such fearful darkness over European society: is such

a class fit for self-government?"³ If South Carolina leaders loved Southern institutions and wanted to sustain Southern society, Taber implored that it was critical to prevent the education of the majority.

Taber concluded his remarks by congratulating South Carolina for not extending its educational policy to include common schools. Taber's remarks offer great insight into the educational beliefs of South Carolina leaders and his address is consistent with the history of the educational policy of South Carolina since 1811. He revealed a truth that there existed little to no desire to educate the white majority in South Carolina.⁴

Taber's address, placed alongside others who disagreed with popular education, gives invaluable insights into the nature and mind of those defending the status quo throughout the antebellum period but particularly in the 1840s and 1850s. Arguments against popular education also helps to contextualize the mindset of dissenters and why there was little action toward the growth of general education. What follows in this

³ Ibid; "Education in South Carolina," *The National Era*, January 12, 1854. Education in South Carolina, *The National Era*, January 12, 1854, "He took the ground boldly, that the laboring class had no right to be educated; that the poor man had to work; and it was useless for him to learn to read and write; that a little education made the people vicious and idle. He opposed the common schools and denounced them as mischievous. He deprecated demagoguism, and urged conservatism, whilst urging the most claptrap arguments in favor of the aristocratic few, who were to be educated, and who were to govern the rest of mankind in their ignorance and poverty!"

⁴ "W.B. Taber, Jr.," *The Camden Journal*, January 10, 1854. Taber did recant his words or at least sought to clarify, He noted, "that he made the Athenian Democracy and the universal enlightenment which prevailed among the whole body of the citizens, the basis of all his remarks, and distinctly recognized the fact that the education of the people was essential to republicanism. He holds no such opinion as that the state should educate a particular class to the exclusion of others; but he believes it to be especially the duty of free government to instruct the citizen, simply because he is a citizen, irrespective of his social position. His comments upon the common-school system were not directed against popular education, but simply against the New England system, which he believes to be faulty, in the hope that his poor efforts might contribute to a thorough examination of the subject, so that our state, in adopting a system for her sons, might select what was good, and avoid what was evil." Continuing, "all this indicates progress in the right direction. If it be true as the New Orleans crescent asserts, that South Carolina "exports her two great staples, cotton, and political science, and consumer less of either than other people," we may conclude that a better day is dawning for the masses of her people, and that general intelligence, prosperity, and happiness, will someday be the portion of all within her borders."

section is an overview of dissenting arguments. It gives space to usually silent but powerful dissenting voices. It is admitted that there is not a legion of dissenting argument discussed in the subsequent pages, and it would be easy to think that evidence of, so few dissenting remarks cannot qualify as revealing the status quo. In some cases, the lack of sources is telling of more theory than fact but in other cases the lack of sources when placed in context is telling of more fact than theory. When considered, the lack of change in the educational policy in the South throughout the antebellum period, it is more beneficial to emphasize the short words discussed by dissenters as an example of a few speaking for the dissenting majority. It is undeniable that their words substantiate the history of the state's educational policy.

For example, in response to Taber's remarks, Major B.F. Perry argued that most of the leaders of the state aligned with Taber's anti-republican and aristocratic beliefs. Major B.F. Perry believed that Taber, in advocating an educational system of the "Athenians" was not only expressing an aristocratic philosophy but also a class model of education that place the producing class of whites on the same level as the enslaved and that the white majority ought to receive their instruction at the knee of the upper class and take in oral instruction just as the enslaved were educated. Perry noted that Taber's ideas were not the private thoughts of a few, but rather his educational beliefs prevailed. Perry noted, "we believed too, at the time we penned that criticism, that there were many in South Carolina who secretly entertained the same views with Mr. Taber in regard to the inutility of Common Schools, the impracticability of the States educating the masses of the people, and the high necessity of her educating a class thoroughly, on whom the others are to be dependent for instruction and teaching in politics, religion, and morals, as

was the case in the Athenian aristocratic oligarchy. These gentlemen believe, too, that “a pure democracy is the worst form of tyranny.”⁵

Mr. Perry was not wrong in his assessment that many state leaders believed as Taber believed. For instance, a writer in *The Camden Journal* responding to Taber’s address noted “We agree with the author (Taber) that conservatism is the safe-guard-that without this principle, no government can be secure-it is the true basis of republicanism. We agree with him in his fundamental views on education and take issue merely upon the statement made by which he would accomplish what we desired to see carried into the effect-the proper education of the people.”⁶

As supporters continued their desire to shift the positioning of popular education from an antirepublican orientation that meant dishonor and poverty to an orientation that found education not only foundational to honor and wealth but as a tool that aided the individual, and the collective, in addition to being highly compatible with republican

⁵ “Major B.F. Perry’s Criticism upon Mr. Taber’s Address.”; “Defense of W.B. Taber Jr.,” *The Camden Journal*, March 10, 1854. Perry was not only one to interpret Taber’s remarks as classist and anti-republican. The *National Era* was extracting the debate from the *Patriot* newspaper, commenting on Taber address also expressed “...I must confess that never before has it fallen to my lot (and I say it with sorrow) to listen to such a farrago of insolence, ignorance, and tyranny, as were embodied in his speech. It was worthy of the dark ages of Europe, and the iron rule of a feudal baron. The whole speech was not only against human liberty, but in opposition to republicanism, to civilization, and spirit of the age. To show the mischief of education among the masses, he appealed to the Northern States! Surely, Mr. Taber has never been in the Northern States, and has adopted all the slang of those who go North every summer to spend their money and enjoy the richness of the North, and return home affecting to despise the North.” The *Patriot*, “characterizing his remarks as an assault, highly offensive and unjustifiable.”

⁶ “Major B.F. Perry’s Criticism upon Mr. Taber’s Address.”; “Defense of W.B. Taber Jr.”; It is a Maxim of Common Law, that when a person is charged with an offense, he is presumed to be innocent until his guilt is proven. Such a presumption is humane and just. A contrary principle would work evil only...a striking instance of what appears to be an unjust condemnation of an individual, has lately occurred, in relation to Mr. W.R. Taber Jr., of Charleston...this gentleman, it appears, delivered an address lately, in Columbia, on the subject of Education, One writer, (B.F. Perry) and only, as far as I have seen, condemned the address in unmeasured terms, attributing to the author in unmeasured terms, attributing to the author sentiments such as no sane man would, at this day, presume to put forth. Mr. Perry’s criticisms contained no proofs, as far as I could see, of anything to substantiate his assertions. And should, there have failed to carry conviction to any reasonable mind, that the criticism was anything else but a prejudiced view of the matter.

ideology. Advocates of popular education helped to advance the discourse on expanding the educational policy of the South to point they helped to produce a tremendous zeal for discussing and reforming popular education in the South. The change in zeal for education did not mean an immediate change in educational policy or educational access, but it did mean a churning in the educational sentiments and general culture, potential for a major change in Southern society.

The changing educational mood of the 1850s was a significant disadvantage to dissenters who had habitually relied on indifference, scorning by ignoring petitions for general education, and the status quo to express their discontent and disinclination. Now that the temperament toward popular education was changing, dissenters had to choose between exposing themselves by speaking out against education, and hope the status quo held firm, or reconcile with popular education and promote popular education. Before the late 1840s, rejecting the theory of popular education was considered a civil public disgrace but it was mildly tolerated; however, with zeal for education that bloomed during the 1850s, publicly rejecting of popular education had become taboo. As an example of the difficulty in expressing dissenting opinions, Albert Howard counting himself among the numbers against general education testified that in the 1850s dissenters were “charged with hostility to the cause of education, because we honestly declared our opinion, that it is useless to offer the means of high instruction to those who neither can nor will avail themselves of it.”⁷

⁷ “Instruction in Schools and Colleges,” *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 6, no. 12 (October 1852): 466.

Despite the hostility, Howard argued that he would stand up for all dissenters and express a comprehensive view of dissenting arguments, which he laid out in a set of objections. His essay, like Taber's remarks, offers vital information to the discovering the mind of dissenters.

As the first objection, Howard contended that dissenters preferred the way the system worked without alterations. Thus, any changes promoted by supporters and reformers were unnecessary and were never worthy of much consideration. Moreover, the problem and tension surrounding reform of education dissenters viewed them as fading trends and not the will of the general population. He believed that the time and climate of the 1850s, which had a spirit of reform woven into the decade did not possess any serious discourse. Thus, Howard argued, dissenters disagreed fundamentally with reformers that the old system needed changes or that the Free School System was defective. Critiquing the idealism of reformers, he insisted that the mere imagining of a better system did not make in practice a better system.⁸

The last point traverses into the next point. According to Howard, dissenters believed reformers had miscalculated the task and ramifications of seeking to educate the majority. Howard contended that reformers failed to ascertain the social position of the masses and failed to see that the majority already possessed what reformers offered in common schools. Had the reformers done their research, Howard claimed, reformers would have learned that general education existed in a way outside of common schools and their proposal was unnecessary. He noted, "an adult, who is ignorant of the art of

⁸ Ibid, 466.

reading and writing, is an unusual sight in any part of this country."⁹ It was Howard's thoughts that reformers did not want to admit to the fact that most Southerners could read and write because reformers sought ill towards the South by desiring a type of education for the majority that challenged the Southern institutions and social order.

He insisted the disagreement with educating the majority above their station constituted the third objection of dissenters. Howard suggested that dissenters disagreed with educating the majority greater than what was necessary for their occupation, status, and fate or any education that posed a challenge to the Southern status quo. The goal of reformers to inform the majority in history, geography, and other sciences, was a futile and overzealous mission.

The fourth objection had a direct focus on sectional politics. Howard argued the dissenters held a consensus that reform was impossible because Northern publishers produced textbooks for Southern audiences that were averse to the interests of Southern institutions. Howard stated, "we confess we have little hope of a true reform so long as such powerful interests are to be combated."¹⁰ If the Southern common school system had to learn from the Northern textbooks, then reject general education and reforms so as to protect the South from hostile ideologies became righteous act which dissenters would be proud to commit.

As reformers in the 1850s amped up the demand to reform education and they also became very intentional on guaranteeing school curriculums reflecting the needs and

⁹ Ibid, 462.

¹⁰ Ibid, 464.

wants of the white majority, and in turn, they rejected the classical studies that dominated Southern schools. The rejection of classical studies for more 'useful' education led to the fifth reason dissenters rejected popular education and educational reform. Howard noted that dissenters viewed the rejection of classical studies for more practical knowledge as a mistake. He explained the origin of the reformers mistake was in asking the lower class what they wanted; Howard rhetorically and paternalistically asked, how can the lower classes know the best form of education for themselves? Such decision must be determined by the ages and the brightest among men.

In addition, Howard insisted that dissenters thought that the questioning of the validity and the expediency of classical education was absurd and a reflection of the low and uncultivated mind of reformers. Dissenters believed there was no form of education was better than that of a classical education. He noted that if reformers had the interests of the white majority in mind they would “demand that classical education should be fostered in our schools.”¹¹ However, reformers objected to classical education and “sadly mistake the highest interests of their children, who, in search after the useful, reject those studies which they ignorantly supposed to be merely ornamental.”¹²

Howard contended that dissenters scoffed at the idea of using that state as a means for establishing popular education and believed any state oversight would require compulsory methods and increased taxes all which was combined as the sixth objection.¹³ Instead of public funding, Howard argued, dissenters favored a volunteer system which

¹¹ Ibid, 465.

¹² Ibid, 465.

¹³ Ibid, 467.

would avoid compulsory methods and raised taxes. He noted, “the only practicable means of improving our schools, so as to place a higher grade of education within reach of the very poor, must be found, either in a compulsory provision on the part of the state, which by directly taxing all for the support of common schools, should compel all persons of moderate fortunes to educate their children by them; or by a voluntary union of the primary schools supported by the state, which those which may be established by private enterprise....whenever such a voluntary association of private with public means is made, we are content to rely implicitly on the wisdom which plans the arrangement.”¹⁴

The belief that education harmed the lower class and disrupted the harmony of society constituted the last objection to popular education. Howard suggested that men who worked for their bread did not have time for education. Moreover, education often made the lower class prone to manipulation. He argued, “education exposes them to the danger of attacks from the demagogue, as well as to the wholesome admonitions of the patriotic.”¹⁵ Dissenters thought reformers were misguided in their beliefs that education had the influential power to change the nature and morality of men for good. Howard noted that dissenters had long held the belief that education did possess the power to change the nature of a man but not always for good. He noted, education to a good-natured man is an instrument for good, but to the bad-natured man education is "a new element of evil." The masses, Howard claimed, were better off without education and

¹⁴ Ibid, 467.

¹⁵ Ibid, 468.

thereby they would be governed by a few good men who used education as an instrument of good.¹⁶

Each objection to general education and reform reflected the fundamental belief that changes were unnecessary. Education for the majority, according to dissenters as expressed by Howard was wholly unnecessary and any attempt at reform would meet resistance. He stated, “Therefore, as designed for the instruction of that large majority of the people who have before them a life of toil, we are satisfied with the results which they have accomplished; and would deprecate any attempt at improvement, lest it should hazard the destruction of the whole system.”¹⁷ Claiming to be the voice of the dissenters, Howard's provided a healthy understanding of the dissenting view. Howard, speaking up for dissenter voiced similar ideas as Taber, both of which demonstrated the desire to maintain the wealthy's control over the less educated and less wealthy.

Taber and Howard were not the only ones to denounce popular education. Many others did so too. Featuring their voices will add to the witnesses and provides a more well-rounded understanding of the opposition to general education.¹⁸

Nicholas Know noted that most reformers or the friends of education have erred in their beliefs and desires to extend or reform education because they follow a fallacious argument. Know argued reformers misplaced assumption that education could mold and refashion the character of men by destroying old habits and replace them with good ones

¹⁶ Ibid, 468.

¹⁷ Ibid, 469-470.

¹⁸ Ibid.

was a great error. The increase of education in the South had not shown a change in habits and character, Know stated, "There are more pupils, more teachers, more schools, more books-but is there more morality? Has crime diminished? Ask the records of your courts? Has virtue increased? Observe the shameless traffic in votes, the constant frauds upon the ballot box, which, in some states, have become the rule of exception, till the very name election seems to be applied satirically, there is so little of unbiased choice in the act."¹⁹ Know contended, those calling for reform simply misunderstood the concept of education, the true character, and nature of the majority.

Also, Know noted the failure of educational reform in the South was the result of two causes. The first concerned the miscalculations of reformers, who unknowingly devalued education by pursuing general education. He noted, "the very men who so loudly eulogize it, practically degrade it. They limit it to the mere process of instructing and exercising the mind. The morals, in most of our schools, are neglected, beyond occasional corporal punishment, for the most glaring outrages upon propriety on the part of the pupils."²⁰

In failing to recognize the nature of the white majority was the second reason for the failure of educational reform in the South. Know argued reformers believed too much in education's ability to refine the lower class and failed to see that the lower-class man, the unprincipled man, can only be refined to an extent; in addition, if education did anything for the lower-class man, education made the 'unprincipled man' worse. Echoing

¹⁹ Nicholas A. Knox, "Modern Education," *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 11, no. 2 (April 1855): 451–76.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 454.

Howard, Knox noted, "Complete intellectual education does but furnishes the unprincipled man with so many more powerful weapons to use against his fellows. His power to do mischief is increased, while his evil disposition is not by any means diminished. Such a mode of education as this would do more harm than good to the community, for, while the scoundrels in it, would retain all their old depravity, they would have gained strength."²¹

His beliefs in the low capacity of the lower class to change their habits and character through education aligned with his belief that education should remain the dominion of a few. He argued that the true nature of education was not for all men and contended that education provided, "sound judgment of the real condition of things, furnishes us with an answer. Its business is to educe, to lead out, to arrange, in the best possible order, all the powers and faculties of man, to bring him as near, as the capabilities of his nature will permit, to the full perfection attainable by his species,"²² And such education is not meant for all men. The clear class angles were present with the words of the dissenters as much as they were in the discourse of reformers.

Thornwell often tottered between dissent and reform, mainly as a way to protect against attacks on South Carolina College, but, he too, echoed the trickle-down educational model, believing a select few in society carried the seeds of progress and change. Explaining his reasoning for a class orientated model of education, he noted,

²¹ Ibid, 455.

²² Ibid, 456.

"light descends from them to their inferior...there are the men who sustain and carry forward the complicated movements of refined civilization-the real authors of changes which constitute epochs in the social elevation of the race...the solitary scholar wields a lever which raises the whole mass of society." ²³

To Thornwell, if education was not of the highest order, or if the highest order or class did not guide education, "general intelligence, without high culture to keep it in check, will exemplify the maxim of the Pope- 'a little learning is a dangerous thing'-and will prove a great curse to the state than absolute ignorance." ²⁴ Much in the same spirit of Taber, Thornwell, for a time, believed in either full education or none, suggesting ignorance to be better than mere learning to read and write as reformers promoted in common schools. He argued "it is not ignorance, but half knowledge, that is "full" of whims and crotchets; they prey on impulse and fanaticism and are the parent of restless agitation and ceaseless change." ²⁵ Like Taber and Know, Thornwell argued that misguided education and the under-enlightening of the lower class did not help society but instead created rebels. Like others, Thornwell thought educating the masses a dangerous endeavor which provided no benefit to society. Thus, he contended that it was best to educate a few and leave the rest to ignorance for, 'one sun is better than a thousand stars.'

²³ J.H. Thornwell, "Dr. J.H. Letter to Governor Manning on Public Instruction in South Carolina," November 1853.

²⁴ Thornwell.

²⁵ Ibid.

Edwin Herriott, wrote as a supportive dissenter, noted that he rejected popular education on the grounds that he doubted the plans and the capacity of reformers. He stated, "we have been conservative, because we feared that the whole system might sink the hands of the reformer," continuing he noted, "It was with a view to save them [the free schools] that we deprecated any change-believing that the result of the inevitable failure of any general system, which might be adopted, would be the abandonment, in disgust, by the state, of the whole school system."²⁶ In addition to denouncing reformers outright, Herriott noted reformers were clueless and too idealistic. He stated, "we suspect that the failure originates in their not having exposed the root of the evil which they deplore, and in not being prepared with any project of a plan by which they would supersede the present system."²⁷ Herriott believed it was better to reject reformers not because he disagreed with general education but rather because reformers had incomplete plans of reform.

The incompleteness of reformer's ideas of education stemmed from reformer's inability to fully understand the consequences of state intervention in matters of education. Herriott disagreed with reformers notions of state oversight because state governance of public education would make education as a "duty" of the state and duty made it a right and a right allowed the state to perform unwanted acts and he feared compulsory education. He stated, "If it is the duty of the state to educate its citizens, it

²⁶ Edwin Herriott, "Education: Common Schools in the States, South Carolina," *Debow's Review Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 18, no. 1 (January 1855): 119–32. Edward Bulwer Lytton Baron Lytton, *Survey of the State of Education, Aristocratic and Popular, and of the General Influences of Morality and Religion* (E.W. & L.D. Newton, printers, 1833): 9.

²⁷ Herriott, "Education."; Edwin Herriott, "Education: Common Schools in the States, South Carolina," *Debow's Review Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 18, no. 1 (January 1855): 124.

must possess the right to compel every citizen to receive an education. How such a right could be exercised in our state against unwilling citizens, it would puzzle the most ingenious jurist to determine.”²⁸

Herriott felt that governmental control not only provided the state with too much power, operating as a centralized institution, but also state education would produce dependency. He stated, state control, "engenders a habit of reliance on the State, and the people forget to help themselves;"²⁹ moreover, state education robbed the people of their independency because by attending government school, "the people are placed in position of recipients of favor, rather than that of independent citizens helping themselves. This is necessary, the paralyzing result of the dependence of the schools upon the public treasury; the paralyzing result of all centralizing system."³⁰ The author insisted that education through a state apparatus may work in the North, which the reformers had hanged their hopes and found models of success, but in South Carolina state education could never work and did more harm than good to the people of the South. Herriot did not disagree with popular education but did disagreed with what he thought were incomplete plans, the growth of a centralizing institutions in South Carolina, the spread of pauperism, and the possible premature death to the Free School System that existed in South Carolina.

The views presented in this section from dissenters of the 1850s illuminates the reason for rejecting popular education. The silent ideas and argument that were harbored

²⁸ Ibid, 126.

²⁹ Ibid, 127.

³⁰ Ibid, 127.

by ruling class of the South to which Taber, Howard, Know, and Heriott articulated remained consistent with the covert reasons for rejecting popular education expressed in occupational prejudices and ideological beliefs about nature and natural superiority. However, by the 1850s dissenters were more direct in their rejection of popular education. The theory that popular education in the South was impractical or god did not intend for the majority to be educated took a back seat to clear-cut class notions that implied that only a privileged few deserved education to which the rest of society would learn from them.

Chapter 7

The institution of Slavery and Popular Education

Part I. Slavery's influence

Slavery as a problem

With the high zeal for popular education this was bolstered in the late 1840s into the 1850s it should come to no surprise that commentators and advocates of popular education also became bold enough to call attention to the role slavery played in creating obstacles to popular education. At times, advocates used sectional tension to direct the blame slavery played in the prevention of instituting systems of public education in the South. Sectional tension allowed advocates to remain aware of the fact that the white population illiteracy statistics grew worse and the institution of slavery had a major role in perpetuating ignorance. For instance, one author contended that popular education did not fail in the South because the common citizen was deficient in natural capacity or that they were in love of ignorance but instead popular education failed to grab any traction among the common citizens because “slavery denies them the blessing of a common school system- it makes such a system an impossibility.”¹ Comparing literacy rates between the native population of the free and slave states over the age of twenty, the findings revealed that in the Free States that are only 1 out of 60 that can neither read or

¹ “Statistic of Education,” *The National Era*, December 1, 1853.

write, as opposed to the slave states were 1 out of 12. Slavery, according to the author, made popular education unfeasible because, “slavery requires large plantations, scatters the population, plants slaves where the free labor ought to be, and renders impossible the concentration of the masses necessary to sustain such a school.”¹

One writer said the evils of the South were great but nothing out ranked the consequences of slavery. Because slavery “dooms thousands of human beings to hopeless ignorance.” With perplexity and confusion, the writer rhetorically asked how could, “any patriotic or Christian mind regard the presence of ignorance? expect with intense anxiety.”²

James C. Bruce accused slavery of being a promoter of social inequality and an enemy of knowledge. Standing in allegiance with those who accused slavery as an enemy of popular education, a sponsor of false religion, corrupter of morals, preventer of law and order, and a hurdle to progress. Bruce argued that the problem with Virginia correlated directly to slavery and the ignorance it required and produced.³

Writing in the *Kentucky Examiner*, one author, contended as long as the South clung to the idea of a slave society, the majority of the Southern community would also be enslaved, many physically and most mentally. The educational difference between the North and the South, rested in the fact that ignorance was requisite for the South’s successful slave society. Relying on comparison, the author contended, “The free states

¹ “Statistic of Education.”

² “Address to the Presbyterians of Kentucky,” *The Examiner*, December 2, 1848.

³ James C. Bruce, “Popular Knowledge: The Necessity of Popular Government, a Lecture,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*. 19, no. 5 (1836): 297-298.

had in 1850 about twice as many whites as they had nearly five times as many pupils in public schools, six times as many volumes in public libraries, and five times as many newspapers which were as much superior in quality as they were greater in number. Why is this? There is but one answer to give. Slavery prevails in the South but does not in the North, and where slavery reigns, ignorance reigns."⁴ Arguing for emancipation, the author believed that once slavery was removed ignorance would erode because intelligence and slavery cannot co-exist, he wrote, "slavery fears intelligence; freedom invites it. Slavery discourages schools; freedom finds its strength in them. Slavery shrinks from books; freedom glories in multiplying them."⁵

Nearly every slave state that attempted to establish a common school system and found it difficult to establish a system compatible with slavery.⁶ Slave states, like South Carolina, did not lack legislation for common school systems, what these states lacked was follow through and as contended, the rulers of Southern states choose neglect as their course of action. Nonetheless, advocates had become convinced that the ruling class neglect derived from the fact that slavery, as it existed, was incompatible with general education. One Kentuckian wrote, "the truth is now pretty generally admitted that a state which cherishes the institution of slavery, must also be cursed with an ignorant white population. This is one of the wretched retribution that slavery brings upon the

⁴ "Who Will Be Harmed by Emancipation?" *The Universalist Quarterly and General Review*, October 1862.

⁵ "Who Will Be Harmed by Emancipation?" 329.

⁶ The main reason for this as many commentators noted was because of the scattered population or low population density. William Simms reiterated his article "Literary Prospects of the South," Paul Hamilton Payne, *Russell's Magazine* (Walker, Evans & Company, 1858), 193-206.

community. The enslavement of the black men is ever associated with the illiteracy of the white masses. If slavery produced no other sad result than this-if no blighting influence other than which banishes the possibility of education from every tenth mind born in the state-if no other gloomy and destructive consequence but ignorance of a large portion of the white race resulted from slavery, even then all the advantage, fancied and real, which slavery confers on a community, would be purchased at a most ruinous price.”⁷

Advocates of popular education and anti-slavery critics had continued to reveal the enlarging class differences in Southern society through comparative statistics which revealed that the benefits of slavery did not always extend to lower rungs of society as professed by pro-slavery commentators. Accusing slavery as an institution that kept the white non-slaveholding class in ignorance should not be viewed merely as a call for education but also as a call to reorganize society (or a call for new rulers) because speaking out against slavery was a dangerous enterprise with dangerous consequences. Francis Lieber well known for his anti-slavery thoughts, when writing Northern friends on his views on slavery urged them to not “let anything I have written slip into the papers.”⁸ The risk commentators were taking should be looked upon as proof as to their commitment to general education but equally important as a response to what they perceived as a dire situation and a need to reform society.⁹

Intellectual block, general education reconsidered, the failure to expand the educational policy

⁷ “Slavery and Education-the Voice of Virginia.”

⁸ Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*, Revised & Enlarged edition (Harper Torchbooks, 1964) 226.

⁹ Eaton, 79.

Historian Armstead Robinson noted between the Missouri Compromise to the Secession Crisis Southern leaders increasingly “erected barriers to the importing of potentially seditious public actions from the North.”¹⁰ Robinson was more than correct. One author in 1860 stated, “now is the time to banish poisonous Northern literature from our schools,-now is the time to aid the educational state journal, which is languishing for want of support.”¹¹ Southern leaders rejected school models and textbooks that were not accustomed to the South “Late events have opened the eyes of the people of the South to the necessity of developing their own moral and material resources; and there is a strong disposition to encourage those who have so long labored, under great difficulties and trials, to domesticate and foster the arts and institutions by which alone nations became self-reliant, independent and prosperous.”¹² The rejection of all things North forced Southerners to ponder the necessity of Southern developments and educational systems that paralleled Southern institutions. Historian John Furman Thomason noted, that “the development of a system of education adapted to the peculiar social and economic conditions of the state,” became a goal of Southern leaders hoping to reject all models of “Northern” origin.¹³

¹⁰ Armstead L. Robinson, Joseph P. Reidy, and Barbara J. Fields, *Bitter Fruits of Bondage: The Demise of Slavery and the Collapse of the Confederacy, 1861–1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004).

¹¹ “Common Schools,” *The Western Democrat*, 1860.

¹² “Common Schools.”

¹³ John Furman Thomason, *The Foundations of the Public Schools of South Carolina* (State Company, 1925): 148. Carl F Kaestle and Eric Foner, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 212. E. N. Elliott et al., *Cotton Is King, and pro-Slavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on This Important Subject* (Augusta, Ga., Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 885.

Austin Hagerman commentating in *The Southern Quarterly* echoed the call for a customized school system for South Carolina. Although, South Carolina had passed a law to establish a form of popular education that had not succeeded, and the reason for South Carolina's failure was because they started with false principles of popular education. Hagerman stated, "We have been studying and imitating foreign systems, based, and in their cases necessarily based, upon the principle of free labor, instead of doing our work in conformity with the nature of our own material. And I believe that if the State will only act consistently with herself, she is able to create and will finally develop such a system of popular education, as none but a slave society can afford-a system which will draw social harmony from materials apparently discordant, and in which every social element will find a field for its peculiar activity."¹⁴

Sectional tension and sectional critique forced many Southern leaders to not only call for popular education, rejected and blocked Northern "institutions," but also to develop an educational system that fit the institutions of the South which would help protect the South from critique. As noted in chapter four on sectional tension, the need for the South to become intellectually independent is best expressed in the petitions for more education, and the need for Southern textbooks, and the development of institutions and mechanisms that would aid in seeking home education and textbooks.

The best stage for addressing the needs of Southern education particularly the need for Southern textbooks for the Southern youth was the Southern commercial conventions held in the South from 1852 through 1857. A small share of these meetings

¹⁴ Austin Q. Hagerman, "Free School System of South Carolina," *The Southern Quarterly Review*. 2, no. 1 (November 1856): 156.

addressed the needs of Southern education.¹⁵ Reporting on the ‘Great Southern Convention in Charleston’ *The DeBow’s Review* noted that the leaders of the convention were adamant about education and resolved to not only rid the South of Northern teachers by establishing normal schools and to ousting out of the Southern mind Northern ideas by publishing Southern textbooks for Southern instruction in Southern ways by Southern men. Convention leaders also recommended “the creation, patronage, and encouragement of establishments for the publication and sale in the Southern states of elementary books of education.”¹⁶ Convention members not only resolved that home education was necessary but also Southerners were needful for intellectual and educational material.

The call for home education as a reaction to sectional tension did have an impact in the South and the building up of Southern institutions. Historian Chalmers Davidson also noted that in the late antebellum period the etiquette of sending children abroad, particularly to the North for preparatory school was a changing trend. By 1860 many South Carolinians attended institutions within the state or another institution below the Mason-Dixon line, the effect of this change was twofold, Southern institutions became more polished as sectional tension increased.¹⁷

To rectify the Northern intellectual threat, Southern leaders and Southern defenders called for an increase of the Southern educational infrastructure, which

¹⁵ J. Isaac Copeland, “The Movement for Free Public Schools in South Carolina to 1868” 1957: 201.

¹⁶ Gustavus Frankenstein, “The Great Southern Convention in Charleston,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress, and Resources*. 16, no. 6 (June 1854): 639. Archibald Roane, “Common Schools and Universities North and South,” *Debow’s Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 18, no. 4 (April 1855): 545–55.

¹⁷ Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *The Last Foray: The South Carolina Planters of 1860: A Sociological Study* (Published for the South Carolina Tricentennial Commission by the University of South Carolina Press, 1971): 46.

included common and normal schools, better universities, teachers, and public support. The second goal of gaining Southern intellectual independence was the call for the publication of Southern textbooks and literature.

For a short while, the call for educational infrastructure and schoolbooks dovetailed with the petition for popular education. Although the request for popular education by Southern defenders were reactive, defensive strategies aroused from regional tension, it did bring more attention to popular education. Initially, the need for an intellectual defense and nationalism allowed for writers to include popular education as a great need of the South especially among the laboring classes. For instance, one author contended, “should that unhappy time ever arrive, when the whole South must rally as one man, and resist or perish, we may rely upon it, that the ‘man of the hour’ will not be found among the ‘curled darlings,’ who imbibed their education at the fact of some abolition Gamaliel of the North: but the ‘true man’ will arise from the working classes of brains and hands: he will be someone who sat on the bench of free school, and obtained his first ideas of the world, from noting and mingling with representatives of all classes that make up such schools, and from books, and from teachers that taught him the history of the South and the destiny of the South.”¹⁸ Writers, albeit seldom, used sectional tension to call for popular education or at least drew more attention to popular education as a way to bring the South together.

Rejection of all things North seemed to have had a democratic tone, opening the way for Southerners of all classes to rally together, but even during times of sectional

¹⁸ “Southern School-Book,” *The Camden Journal*, September 28, 1852.

tension, the educational goals for most Southern states did not expand its focus to include popular education. In fact, the call for home education and the call for Southern textbooks had little to no effect on the education of the majority because at the time the vast majority could neither send their children abroad, pay for academies in Northern states, nor attend private schools in their home states and dreaded free schools if they existed. Consequently, the call for greater educational infrastructure and Southern educational literature had little to do with training the majority and the focus remained on the few and future leaders of the South. When advocates of sectional intellectual independence spoke about expending energy on education, much of the efforts went towards the education of the wealthier class and not toward the majority.¹⁹

Despite Southerners the desire for intellectual independence, the South, as one author noted, did nothing to improve education because education laid outside the interest of slavery. The author noted, 'The Great Southern Convention,' which boasted a new commitment to education throughout the South to encourage and harvest Southern talents was worthless. Commenting three years after the first convention, the author reminded her/his peers of the failures of the convention, the writer noted "here we have a set of brave resolutions, valorous words, high resolves, up to the 'do or die' or 'last extremity' point, and what have they profited the South? Who has attempted to carry them out, or who have thought of them since the clever and patriotic gentlemen who wrote them

¹⁹ Rev. John J. Keane, "University of the South," *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*. 26, no. 3 (March 1859): 330–35. The University of the South now called Sewanee: The University of the South in Tennessee is an excellent example of the energy spent toward the wealthy. E. N. Elliott et al., *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on This Important Subject* (Augusta, Ga., Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 577.

quitted Charleston?"²⁰ Answering, the author stated, "The energy of the convention died with it, and no governor of the Southern state, no legislature, no council of the Cherokees, no board of trade, no railroad company, has ever bestowed one thought upon any one of these resolutions. Southern trade, Southern commerce, Southern education, colleges, free schools...are precisely as they were before the convention met."²¹ The reason for the inadequate response of Southern leaders rested on slavery, the author stated, "it is because slave society is a failure, that we have these Southern conventions, and that all such conventions fail."²²

Hinton Rowan Helper a Southern abolitionist believed the absences of effective popular education systems, the lack of normal schools, the lack of large pools of Southern teachers, the lack of advanced publishing houses was directly attached to the long Southern habit of neglecting general educational or any matter that laid outside of the politics of slavery. The irony of the Southern position may cause laughter to some, but for people like Helper, the Southern plight was a place of frustration and significant harm to the non-slaveholders.

Helper claimed he knew the outcome of the great Southern Convention, and he claimed he predicted that the fool's errand call of intellectual independence would end in nothing. The attempt to create schoolbooks in the South and to remove all Northern textbooks that castigated slavery and promoted abolitionist was all fantasy because the

²⁰ "The First Want," *Richmond Examiner*, January 1, 1857.

²¹ "The First Want."

²² "The First Want." William Taylor, "Toward a Definition of Orthodoxy: The Patrician South and the Common Schools," *Harvard Educational Review* 36, no. 4 (1966): 412-26.

South was too dependent on the North to develop educational and intellectual independence in a few years. To illustrate his point, Helper stated, "A gentleman in Charleston, S.C. is devoting his energies to the preparation of a series of pro-slavery elementary works, consisting of primers, reader, etc, and lo! They are all printed, stitched, and bound North of the Mason and Dixon's line!... The truth is, that not school-books alone, but works of almost every class produced by the South, depend upon Northern enterprise and skill for their introduction to the public. Mr. DeBow, the eminent Statistician, publishes a Southern review, purporting to be issued from New Orleans. It is printed and bound in the city of New York."²³ With dependence on the North for its published materials, along with, the reality that the masses were not provided nor prepared for the opportunity to learn and, to good extent, the majority of non-slaveholders had come to believe that education was a luxury for the few. Helper discussed the quest for intellectual independence as "mere babble of idiocy."²⁴

Southern leaders may have pondered the need to develop intellectual independence, but they desired more, to resist the expansion of education and intellectual culture. Leaders had long found that the only option the South had to protect itself intellectually, from foreign and domestic foes, was to limit the freedom of speech and thought within the South.

Slavery prevented intellectual outgrowths

²³ Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of South: How to Meet It.*, 1860.

²⁴ Helper, 406-408.

The changing political climate of the antebellum period, which increasingly pushed Southern leaders to defend Southern institutions against external threats and potential internal threats resulted in a continued desire to constrict and concentrate intellectual energies. The suffocation of free thought and speech resulted in the stifling of intellectual outgrowths throughout the antebellum period. One of the significant intellectual minds of the South, Francis Lieber wrote in his diary how slavery prevented intellectual outgrowths by monopolizing the intellectual minds that did exist. In Lieber's estimation, slavery limited the number of wealthy who could ascertain 'things of the mind,' and relegated the majority to labor who had not the time nor the appetite for education. Lieber decried while in Columbia, South Carolina, "how far I am from active, progressive and intellectual life and then slavery, that vile, selfish institution!"²⁵ He noted that the entire state was reduced to servitude, not limiting servitude to enslaved blacks nor physical labor, but, Lieber believed white minds were intellectually reduced to servitude. Lieber comments highlighted how slavery was an all-consuming institution, which intentionally or unintentionally prevented intellectual offshoots like general education.

The political economy of slavery limited intellectual outgrowths because it mobilized the intellectual and educational institutions to defend and improve slavery. Of the few that received education in the antebellum South, the majority were swallowed up by the need to defend slavery and become "political soldiers." Richard Weaver stated Southern educational institutions and its political soldiers were relegated to "building up a rigid theology to defend a social order with which their fortunes stood. The

²⁵ Ernest Nys, *Francis Lieber--His Life and His Work: Part I* (The American Journal of International Law, 1911), 87-97.

concentration upon this task, which began with academic education, continued with maturity, and flowered, as often it did, in a manifesto bearing the fruits of conscientious research and meditation, left little room for the more disinterested kind of creativeness.”²⁶

Another consequence of defending slavery included the need to develop an intellectual blockade. The intellectual blockade was designed to not only curtail external criticism of slavery but to inhibit public criticism of slavery from within the South. For example, on the federal level, Southern congressmen in the House of Representatives instituted in 1836, the “gag rule,” to prevent discussing slavery and anti-slavery materials in the House by postponing all discussion on slavery. From the Missouri crisis until Reconstruction to oppose slavery became a crime against Southern society. A more severe gag rule operated in the South which prevented Southerners from speaking out against slavery. W.J Cash noted "down to the civil war it was possible for a man to be an open atheist or agnostic in most districts, though perhaps not in all, without suffering any greater penalty than being denounced every Sunday from the local pulpits and subjected to the angry mutters or the intrusive warnings and jeremiads of his neighbor, the jeers and maybe the missiles of the children, when he passed among them. However, when the great central nerve of slavery was touched, there was no such latitude."²⁷ Historian W. J. Cash noted:

And the defense of slavery not only eventuated, as we have seen, in a taboo on criticism; in the same process it set up a ban on all analysis and inquiry, a terrified

²⁶ Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, First Edition (Washington, D.C.: Lanham, MD: Regnery Books, 1989): 97.

²⁷ Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 89.

truculence toward every new idea, a disposition to reject every innovation out of hand and hug to the whole of the status quo with fanatical resolution.²⁸

Historian Keri Merritt noted, "certainly, in a slave society, both ideas and words were dangerous. Any utterance against Southern labor system-a system predicated on slavery-could have endangered the job prospects, lines of credit, and even the life and liberty of the speaker. Given the master class's overt defensiveness, any complaint was liable to be misinterpreted. Poor whites and non-slaveholders had to monitor carefully what they said, and the complete absence of a universal education system denied them the option of privately, or even anonymously, committing their thoughts and opinions to pages. They must have found it incredibly difficult to amass knowledge or to express opinions without worries over slaveholder retaliation."²⁹

Helper noted, "the entire mind of the South either stultifies itself into acquiescence with slavery, succumbs to its authority, or chafes in indignant protest against its monstrous pretensions and outrageous usurpations."³⁰ By limiting the freedom of thought and speech in the attempt to close off the opponents of slavery at least from

²⁸ Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 98.

²⁹ Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 153. Cairness, *The Slave Power: Its Character, Career, and Probable Designs: Being an Attempt to the Real Issue Involved in the American Contest*. On the Southern intellectual blockade see "Five Years' Progress of the Slave Power" *The British Quarterly Review* January and April, 1857.

³⁰ Helper, *The Impending Crisis Of South*. 411. Frederick Adolphus Packard, *Thoughts on the Condition and Prospects of Popular Education in the United States* (Printed by A. Waldie, 1836), 12-13. Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*. Eaton noted, "The late years of Helper were tragic. An outcast from his native state, he becomes alienated from the Republican party because its reconstruction measures neglected the poor white and elevated the negro...in 1909, an old man of eighty years, he committed suicide in a room on Pennsylvania Avenue, declaring despondently, 'there is no justice in this world,' and affirming that 'he was tired of living anyway.'" 245

within stunted the mental cultures and intellectual offshoots like general education.³¹ As Southern leaders became more fearful of resistance to slavery from within and from without, the anxiety pushed leaders to attempt a mental and cultural blockade, which would shield that Southern society from antagonistic positions or the opportunity to learn contrary opinions. The side effects of slavery amass when taking account of its role in the failure of popular education.

The repercussion from the lack of free thought and speech created hostility against learning and an expansion of the mental culture. During the increased interest for popular education in the 1850s, there was a perception that systems of common schools were an invention of despotic[s] and such schools taught isms and ideologies which the majority often used to question the order of society. Southern leaders in the background of section tension adopted the perception that freedom of thought and popular education were a security risk and threats to Southern society which Southerner leaders did not tolerate.

Distrust and a little education can be a dangerous thing, the desire for ignorance

Suspicion of Northern influence and Northern models of education which included popular education increased Southern leaders' inclination to remain against educating the masses and the general diffusion of knowledge. The power of knowledge

³¹ Cash. Helper, *The Impending Crisis Of South*, 361-362. Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*. 150.

created fear among Southern leaders to cause them to not only project an education philosophy that rejected popular education but to prefer ignorance for the white majority.

Commonly believed to be a unifying tool or a powerful weapon to divide or revolutionize kingdoms, knowledge of the masses placed much caution in the mind of Southern leaders. Historian William Taylor contended that as Southern leaders considered intellectual independence as a question of security, they concluded, popular education and the diffusion of knowledge was more of a vice than a virtue. Taylor noted Southerners pondered on the following questions: "if the declared end of education was the inculcating of both public and private virtue then who could be trusted with knowledge? moreover, how much of it could be administered to the population in general without subverting the very thing it was intended to preserve?" The matter of popular education was placed in direct contention with the subsistence of slavery.

As Southern leaders continued to meditate on the question of popular education, they continued to raise issues about the intellectual security of the South. Security questions such as if popular education was developed in the South, how much education should be provided to the masses? Who should teach? Where would the teachers come from? The issue of security and education was forced into consideration because of the increasing sectional tension, comparative statistics that argued the white majority did not benefit from slavery, the pro-educational arguments and popular educational zeal of the final two decades before the Civil War drew out class problems and Southerner leaders' insecurity of non-slaveholders becoming an antagonistic force from within the South.

By the 1850s, Southern leaders had to respond to the educational, which the status quo had normally provided a sufficient reply to educational reform, but as the educational

question became more than about spending, taxes, class rivalries, and more about protecting the South from a combination of threats. Southern leaders, although had long held the proclivity to withhold education from the majority in the 1850s they firmly concluded popular education was not beneficial to Southern security. In fact, Southern leaders believed the white majority could not be trusted with knowledge and education if Southern society as it existed was to continue. Southern leaders feared that education may convince the white majority to turn away from the slaveholders orientation of republicanism, reconfigure republicanism according to their needs, take the side of the North, and the enslaved blacks if a large rebellion commenced.³²

The distrust Southern leaders had in the education of the white majority is reflected in the ruling class focus on the education of the few and their articulations that the South would only find security by the guidance of the educated few. Southern leaders did not rule the South by force but by custom, ostracization, and habit of deference of the non-slaveholding class. The fear of losing the power to easily persuade the popular mind and white solidarity forced Southern leaders to resist education of the majority and keep among the few.³³ For example, William Harper unequivocally believed it was the ruling class that must lead and guide the South. Harper noted, "It is an aristocracy, and we by our position are *conservatives*, and it is our business to show that conservatives are the

³² Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 68. Shore noted, if a majority of white Southerners doubted their 'peculiar institutions' validity, they could act within the republican, majority system to crush it." (3) Shore also noted, "the elite know that the potential for rebellion resulting from the South's black/white division was matched by non-slaveholders/slaveholder division." (21)

³³ Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 31-43. Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*, Revised & Enlarged edition (Harper Torchbooks, 1964).

truest reformers. We will not overturn the fundamental institutions of society; but we will improve them to the utmost where they are capable of improvement-- supply their deficiencies and remedy their abuses. It is by this aristocratic feature that we hope to preserve a republican form of policy; and by this alone, as I firmly believe, can it be perpetuated.”³⁴ To Harper, the lower classes with "defective intelligence and morality, and continually excited to innovation by the exigency of their condition," threatened the maintenance of the social order. Harper's viewed the expansion of education to the white majority an irresponsible act.³⁵

The ruling class viewed an education policy that expanded educational opportunities to the white masses as a threat to the security and continuity of the Southern status quo. Southern leaders rejected popular education and believed knowledge was best kept within the sphere of the ruling class. Instead of popularizing education as a means to protect the social order, South Carolina leaders simply rejected popular education in nearly every form outside of the home, church, and general culture. To South Carolina leaders, every model of popular education in existence, if adopted would begin an unpredictable revolution; Bruce Eelman contended that South Carolina leaders were “weary of any legislation that might weaken their grip on the reins of politic power.”³⁶

³⁴ Marian Yeates, “Domesticating Slavery: Patterns of Cultural Rationalization in the Antebellum South, 1820-1860” (Indiana University, 1996), <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/304239332/abstract/FF6CD5C302534C93PQ/1>. Yeates, Marian. *Domesticating Slavery: Patterns of Cultural Rationalization in the Antebellum South, 1820-1860*, (1996): 9.

³⁵ Yeates.: 47-48. Robert Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc*, 1837, Wickliffe, " 9-10. E. N. Elliott et al., *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on This Important Subject* (Augusta, Ga., Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), <http://archive.org/details/cottoniskingpros00elli>.

³⁶ Bruce W. Eelman, “An Educated and Intelligent People Cannot Be Enslaved’: The Struggle for Common Schools in Antebellum Spartanburg, South Carolina,” *History of Education Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2004):

William Trescot thought education too dangerous a tool to be generally diffused. He contended that popular education as provided in free labor societies teased the laborer of hopes that could never be satisfied. He thought to educate the higher faculties and passions among the masses was a fatal mistake, mainly, "while the material interests and old organization of society refuses them admission into that sphere and forbids them the use of those faculties, no power under heaven could prevent wild and ruinous social convulsion."³⁷

Trescot argued that dangers of knowledge would manifest when the laborer recognized that her/his condition is more fixed and designed by the imaginations, systems, and works of men, and not the heavens. Knowledge, he contended, had the supreme power to awaken the spirit of the laborer and show the laborer that the actual cause of his immobility and powerlessness of his current state was social organization. Education opened the mind to that truth and would force the laborer to choose to submit or rebel against the social organization which oppressed him. Thus, Trescot articulated it made no sense to educate when education cultivated class distrust, conflict, and potentially planted the seeds of revolution. General education with the prospect of rebellion and disruption of the social order was too high of a price to pay to spread education to the majority. Trescot masked his critique of the educational policy of general education in free labor societies, but it is clear he was explaining why South Carolina should not adopt popular education. To Trescot, Southern leaders would become fools to

255. Market approach to education see Janis Price Greenough and Berkeley University of California, *Resistance to the Institutionalization of Schooling in the Antebellum Southern Highlands*, 1999.

³⁷ Ibid, 147.

place the power of revolution in possession of lower classes, black or white, in free labor or slave states.

As Southern leaders viewed popular education as a threat to Southern security, they were more willing to say that education was adequately contained with a few and for the majority ignorance would suffice. The ruling class had resolved that education should be a reserved enterprise for the wealthy.

The educational question during the late 1840s and 1850s bore the fact that Southern leaders did not trust the white majority with the keys of knowledge. Southern leaders understood the threat of education and the power it could bring to the lower classes and held the belief that “so long as knowledge was conceived of as omnipotent it could neither be safely withheld nor freely administered.”³⁸ The ruling class mindset toward popular education rested on the conviction that to protect the slave society and prevented class warfare, education must remain with a few. Southern aristocrat George Fitzhugh put it this way, “liberty for the few-slavery, in every form for the mass!...we conclude that about nineteen out of every twenty individuals had a natural and inalienable right to be taken care of and protected, to have guardians, trustees, husbands, or masters; in other words, they have a natural and inalienable right to be slaves. The one in twenty are as clearly born or educated or some way fitted for command and liberty.”³⁹

It may be sufficient to use the words of Historian Horace Mann Bond to understand how the wealthy had contrived an educational philosophy and educational

³⁸ Taylor, “Toward a Definition of Orthodoxy.” 424.

³⁹ Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation*, 2nd Revised ed. edition (Middletown, Conn.: Scranton, Pa: Wesleyan, 1988), 160-163.

institutions to perpetuate their desires. Bond noted, “in the widest expanse of the Southern territory the lower economic class among white persons were politically powerless. Protesting that public education was a dangerous “agrarian” institution, the slave oligarchy in control of public office and power strenuously opposed the establishment of systems of tax-supported schools for the lower classes. Continuing he noted, “Having taken care that the interests of the dominant class should not be usurped by either suppressed white classes or the enslaved negro caste, the planters developed an educational system for their own sons which was well designed to perpetuate the civilization of which they were a part.”⁴⁰ The truth of the ruling class is that they preferred the masses not to be educated and these masses included whites, if the slave society was to continue, education must be withheld from the white majority.⁴¹

A supporter of education, James Gilmore firmly believed that educating the white majority would cause foundational changes to Southern society. By considering the hypothetical situation of a consistent effort toward popular education. Gilmore asked, how long would slavery last if the white majority were not ignorant? How long would slavery last if free schools were built at every crossroad? Although exaggerating, he contended, slavery would not last an hour because with education the lower class would become conscious of what prevented their progress and would decide to vote slavery out of existence. Gilmore understood that such a prospect forced the ruling class to "shut out

⁴⁰ Horace Mann Bond, “Education in the South,” *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 12, no. 5 (1939): 264–274.

⁴¹ Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, 163. Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*, 46–47. Tappan, “American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.”

schools and knowledge to keep slavery in existence ‘because if you give a man knowledge and, however poor, he'll act for himself.’⁴²

The aims to keep the majority uneducated by the rulers of the South stunned M.D. Conway. Conway a supporter and an advocate for free schools in Virginia grew an intense desire to developing a school system after learning of the statistical illiteracy of the white majority. Conway recalled discussing general education with leading statesmen of Virginia and his recollection stressed how the statesmen sneered at discourse and proposed legislation of a common school system demonstrating that Southern leaders resented diffusing knowledge to the majority.

Senator James Murray Mason, Conway noted was “vehement in denouncing the education of the white masses and declared that such education would be surely followed by the introduction into the South of the entire swarm of Northern ‘ism.’” Not only did Conway gain a sense of the mind of the ruling class during his discussion with Senator Mason but after publishing a pamphlet entitled, *Free Schools in Virginia*, seeking to promote the cause of general education, Conway noted that the leading men and journals of the state attacked his pamphlet for attempting to introduce “into the South the worst phase of New England society-as the effort to make a ‘mob-road to learning,’ for if they (the lower class) were educated, they would revolutionise Southern society.”⁴³

The reception of his pamphlet led Conway to conclude, “...I felt that the wretchedness of ignorance of the poor whites around me...were deliberately fostered by

⁴² James R. (James Roberts) Gilmore, *Among the Pines: Or, South in Secession-Time* (New York, J. R. Gilmore [etc.], 1862).

⁴³ Moncure Conway, *Testimonies Concerning Slavery*, 1864.

the higher classes.”⁴⁴ Speaking to the battle over popular education, Conway explained what he saw as deliberate ignorance and a silent battle between classes, in which Conway noted, as a supporter of general education, “I was disposed to take the side of the poor, and show how deeply wronged they were.”⁴⁵

Part II.

Southern leaders preferred ignorance

A closer examination of the educational policy of Southern leaders toward the education of the white majority highlights a policy of mass ignorance. To one writer, the desire for ignorance in the South was no different from the desire of despotic governments. The author wrote, "in real despotism, we find, as a general rule, that the Governments will not institute public schools, and that they discourage rather than encourage them. Colleges, which are not only in the reach of the few and wealthy, they may tolerate, and even endow, but not schools for the masses. The common people must be left in ignorance."⁴⁶ The parallels were evident, the South, like a despotic government lacked public schools and, too, discouraged the promotion of them. Moreover, the South supported educational institutions that were out of reach for the majority by the same apparatus leaders deemed incapable of supporting the majority. The author sought to show that the South not only rejected the idea of a republic but deliberately fostered ignorance to maintain the despotic rule.

⁴⁴ Moncure Conway, 34.

⁴⁵ Moncure Conway, 34.

⁴⁶ “Slavery against Public Schools,” *The National Era*, June 25, 1857.

Concerning the education of the majority of Southern leaders followed the maxim that “a little learning is a dangerous thing.” Southern writings also revealed ignorance as the education policy for the masses. The following block quote summarizes the Southern educational policy and demonstrated the promotion of ignorance:

Is it not, we ask, less dangerous to have the masses subject, indeed, to the vis inertioe of absolute ignorance, but to the well-regulated guidance of natural and unforced intelligence, than to scatter among them a few imperfect hints of knowledge, which creates a superficiality of mind constantly tending to ultraism to vanity of opinion, to ‘free-thinking,’ to socialism, and at last to atheism?...the consequence of such a system of popular education must be disastrous to society. Its direct tendency is to ultraism of every kind. It is, in fact, the principal source of all those classes of factious error which are summarily designated as the isms of Northern society, and which illustrate the proposition that the most dangerous form of error is in partial truth. The seductive power of these isms over half-informed minds is almost absolute, while they tend inevitably to anarchy. We briefly recognize in them, as the consequence of the system of education we deprecate, the disposition of the people to follow after every specious novelty, the morbid passion for rash theoretical reforms.⁴⁷

The fear that popular education may teach the majority to challenge the legitimacy of upper ranks, for Southern rulers, whose security relied on the perpetuation of Southern society, educating the masses was not a risk worth taking. If the lower class were to gain

⁴⁷ “Slavery against Public Schools.” Kaestle and Foner, *Pillars of the Republic*.

a working common school system it would not be something the ruling class instituted, but rather, a byproduct of struggle and force. Southern leaders weighed and judged the prospects of general education and found general education to have too great of a potential to injure the ruling class.⁴⁸

Much like the enslaved, the white majority was mostly instructed orally, though it was not forbidden from them to learn. For the most part, the amount of education an individual could afford determined the amount education that could be attained and for the majority that was not much. Southern society should not be looked at as an exception; Southern leaders held similar sentiments toward the producing classes as most European societies. The producing classes throughout the world were illiterate. Southern leaders believed an illiterate majority made their society better. Because education, as they saw it, “creates an appetite for leisure that the harsh realities of the world cannot provide to any but a favored few.”⁴⁹ Thus, it was safest to withhold education from the majority and avoid a struggle over luxury and the dividing of resources, which they ruling class safely held.⁵⁰

The Southern educational policy of the South denounced general education not merely because of the cost, scattered population, the lack of proper designs for common schools that reflected Southern needs but because general education would provide

⁴⁸ Charles Lee Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina: A Documentary History, 1790-1840* (Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1908), 597-598.

⁴⁹ Taylor, “Toward a Definition of Orthodoxy.” 425; *Common Schools. Remarks on the School Law of the Last Session of the Legislature: And Information Concerning the Common Schools of Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, &c. &c* (gratuitous distribution., 1826), 28-29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 426.

knowledge to the majority.⁵¹ Knowledge, it was feared, may cause Southern society to implode from the inside. The lack of an educational policy that included popular education, not only showed how the ruling class viewed education as a dangerous tool but also how ignorance was a useful tool to stabilize and secure the Southern social order from external and internal threats.⁵²

Ignorance and slaveholders educational advantage

The educational policy of ignorance had purpose, one of the purposes was to provide slaveholders with an intellectual advantage over the majority. It must be understood that education provided a significant advantage to the slaveholder which had grave consequences for the uneducated. One author speaking to the benefit of education for ruling class and the desire of others, noted:

Popular liberty, equal laws, general happiness seem to be impossible to be maintained, for any long time, in an uneducated community. The only means which the majority of men have for the bettering their condition, and sustaining a competition with the more fortunate few, who happen to have been born to wealth, or nurtured under peculiar advantages, is in themselves, in their power of thought, their ingenuity, their foresight, their moral energy-just the traits brought out by means of the early discipline and instruction of the Common Schools. The

⁵¹ Taylor. Marc Bloch and Geoffrey Koziol, *Feudal Society*, 1 edition (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 79. Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 162.

⁵² "Condition of the South.; Nature of Its Aristocracy Its Influence on Politics Its Progress or Destruction Necessary Its Consequent Unity and Determination.," *The New York Times*, May 23, 1862, sec. News, <http://www.nytimes.com/1862/05/23/news/condition-South-nature-its-aristocracy-its-influence-politics-its-progress.html>."

only way of securing a Republican equality, and of course, an equal legislation, equal rights, and common privileges are by general education. In physical strength, men are nearly equal. In mental capacity, they are scarcely less so. At least, neither bodily nor mental powers are distributed according to any distinction of rank or social condition among men. The gifted mind, as well as the stalwart, is found in all states of life-among the poor as often as among the rich, among the lowly no less than among the lofty. Moreover, therefore, it is not possible that great inequalities of privilege should continue in a cultivated society. All advantage of the few over the many-all aristocratic superiority is maintained by mind and the instrumentalities which mind creates. There must first be an aristocracy of intellect before there can be an aristocracy of power. Popular ignorance is the soil for tyrants. Public intelligence and public virtue are the best securities of liberty and equal laws. In the long run, it is impossible for the oppression of the masses of society to be sustained by any means but their ignorance.⁵³

Another author wrote on the topic of the advantage education provided the ruling class over the uneducated, noted:

We may observe (and this is a most important and startling truth) that nearly all social excesses arise, not from intelligence, but from inequalities of intelligence. When civilization makes her efforts by starts and convulsions, her progress may be great, but terror and disaster mark it; when some men possess a far better

⁵³ *Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools to the Legislature of New-Hampshire: June Session, 1847. Published by Order of the Legislature* (from the Dartmouth Press, 1847), 23-24.

education than others of the same rank, the first is necessarily impelled to an unquiet Ambition, and the last easily misled into becoming its instruments and tools.⁵⁴

The withholding of education from the majority was simultaneously a strategy to keep information and the power of knowledge within a few as it was about keeping the majority ignorant as a method to rule over them and used them for whatever purposes deemed necessary by the powerful.

Hinton Rowan Helper of North Carolina exposed the educational policy of ignorance as a strategy for ruler-ship. Helper articulated his thoughts in a book titled *The Impending Crisis of the South*. The essence of the book was to call for the end of slavery which would aid the non-slaveholding whites and free them from the blight of slavery. The book challenged the normalcy of Southern society, and his opinions were not taken lightly by the powers of the South. For instance, in many places in the South *The Impending Crisis* was considered dangerous literature. Historian David Brown noted, that “despite attempts to prevent the book’s circulation, evidence suggests that there was a Southern demand for, and circulation of, *The Impending Crisis*...”⁵⁵ In some cases, the distribution of the book meant jail time. For instance, “Harold Wyllys was sentenced to a year in jail for distributing the Crisis in upcountry Greenville, South Carolina.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Edward Bulwer Lytton Baron Lytton, *Survey of the State of Education, Aristocratic and Popular, and of the General Influences of Morality and Religion* (E.W. & L.D. Newton, printers, 1833).

⁵⁵ David Brown, “Hinton Rowan Helper: The Logical Outcome of the Non-Slaveholders’ Philosophy?,” *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 1 (2003): 39–58. Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, 2nd edition (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan, 1988), 67.

⁵⁶ Brown, 54. “The fact that Southerners read Helper’s book is not, of course, evidence that they supported his arguments. One Snippet of evidence suggests that it was at least possible that it had the desired effect on some non-slaveholders. Daniel Orem, an acquaintance of Gunnison, requested more copies from his

Historian Clement Eaton noted, "it became a crime to circulate this book in the South, as the conviction of Daniel Worth at Greensboro proved; even to own a copy was dangerous. The newspapers of the Southern States did not try to refute its arguments but engaged in violent invectives against its author. William E. Stevenson, afterward governor of West Virginia, was indicted for circulating *The Impending Crisis* in Wood County, but he was not brought to trial."⁵⁷ Historian Lauren Shore wrote that the *Impending Crisis* eclipsed Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "in slaves and in political significance."⁵⁸

The reason the book created a stir was that it not only questioned the power of slaveholders and the institution of slavery but asked non-slaveholder to reject the slaveholders' ideas and to recognize how slavery had injured their social, political, and economic progress. Helper entreated non-slaveholders to become aware of their ignorance as a way to perceive a truer reality of their condition and understand their true relationship to the ruling class. Helper's book, particularly his discussion on education and ignorance, brought the goals of most advocates of education to the forefront of the class relations in the South.

For Helper, the educational policy of ignorance was necessary for the continuing of slavery, and thus, slavery was the greatest obstacle to popular education. Ignorance abounding among the non-slaveholders allowed slaveholders the capacity to manipulate

abolitionist colleague in late 1859, writing the *Crisis* was 'in demand' in Dorchester County Maryland, and that he expected 'to sell and give away more than 200 copies in this county'; and many of them say they had no idea of this disadvantages of slavery 'till they read this book."

⁵⁷ Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*.

⁵⁸ Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 69.

the majority by deceitfully crafting ideas of freedom that non-slaveholders would adore but in reality, had no worth.⁵⁹ Helper noted, "the lords of the lash are not only absolute masters of the blacks...however, they are also the oracles and arbiters of all non-slaveholding whites, whose, freedom is merely nominal, and whose unparalleled illiteracy and degradation is purposely and fiendishly perpetuated."⁶⁰

The lack of education allowed designing men, those with education and influence, to direct the mind of the South through false impressions and demagogue rhetoric that turned the majority's vision from their real condition and needs. He commented that fostered ignorance allowed the hallucination of equalitarianism of Southern society to persist and these mirages made the poor proud in all things. For instance, Helper noted that ignorance made them (the poor) proud to gain the vote and achieve a say in traditional politics, but ignorance and pride also blinded them from understanding the nature of politics and the interests of the politicians they elected. He repeatedly noted how the ignorance of the white majority made them sightless to the fact that the very

⁵⁹ Helper, *The Impending Crisis Of South*. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*, unknown edition (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 1997). Michael Wayne, "An Old South Morality Play: Reconsidering the Social Underpinnings of the Proslavery Ideology," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 3 (1990): 861. Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics*, Revised edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985):980. Edward Pessen, "How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?," *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 5 (1980): 1119-49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1853242>. Wayne, "An Old South Morality Play." 836-838. Educational domination of planters- of South Carolina two-thirds of them had a collegiate background. Wooster noted, "wealthy Southerners as a whole were well educated and made generous provisions for the education of their offspring." Gary W. Gallagher, ed., "Southerners on the Eve on the Civil War," in *Essays on Southern History: Written in Honor of Barnes F. Lathrop*, 1st edition (The University of Texas at Austin, 1980).

⁶⁰ Helper, *The Impending Crisis Of South*. In fact, Historian Michael Wayne suggested that "in the old South, slavery at least to some extent retarded economic development that would have benefited elements of the white community. Furthermore, during the 1850s, opportunities for non-slaveholders to rise into the slaveholding class were clearly declining." Wayne, "An Old South Morality Play." 840. McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 91-92.

people they elected did not seek to improve their condition but counted on their continued poverty and ignorance to stay in power. To complicate the matter, Helper argued these elected officials, often aided in the designs to keep the majority impoverished and ignorant; he contended, “the arrogant demagogues whom you have elected to offices of honor and profit, have hoodwinked you, trifled with you, and used you are mere tools for the consummation of their wicked designs. They have purposely kept you in ignorance, and have, by moulding your passions, and prejudices to suit themselves, induced you to act in direct opposition to your dearest rights, and interests.”⁶¹ For Helper, being an abolitionist for the white majority, he attempted to make his peers aware of their ignorance and how the continued lack of education among the non-slaveholders assisted their oppression.⁶²

Helper elaborating on the purpose of ignorance noted that the mis-education and the lack of education of many Southerners perpetuated ignorance yet not a wild ignorance; but rather, a bridled form of ignorance. Bridled ignorance or designed ignorance served to make the majority useful and predictable to the hands of the few. Helper contended, this form of ignorance was the result of being raised and shaped in Southern culture, which trained all Southerners in general thought, behavior, and habit compatible with maintaining the status quo. Consequently, Helper argued non-

⁶¹ Helper, *The Impending Crisis Of South*.

⁶² José Porfirio Miranda and José María Díez-Alegría, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, trans. John Eagleson, Second Pr. edition (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1974). Judge A. P. Upshur, “Domestic Slavery Volume 5, Issue 10, Oct 1839; Pp. 677-687,” *Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*.

slaveholders were trained to be counted on to uphold and defend slavery without a genuine stake in slavery.⁶³

Slavery was the chief obstacle to general education because slavery relied and depended on the ignorance and servitude of the white majority. Helper noted, "where a system of enforced servitude prevails, a fearful degree of ignorance also prevails, as it necessary accompaniment. The enslaved masses are, of course, thrust back from the fountains of knowledge by the strong arm of the law, while the poor non-slaveholding classes are almost as effectually excluded from the institutions of learning by their poverty."⁶⁴ Continuing to note, how an educational policy of ignorance was at the core of the slave power, Helper stated, "slavery is hostile to general education; its strength, it's very life, is in the ignorance and stolidity of the masses; it naturally and necessarily represses general literary culture."⁶⁵

James Madison said, "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives," so was the case in the South. All those who were ignorant were ruled

⁶³ When it is said that Southern education took placed culturally, they are referencing the cultural doctrines that trained the masses to keep their place and protect slavery at all cost. This is not to say that this training was absolute, for power is rarely absolute but rather the bridle ignorance was enough to guide the South, it was at once the ideas that separate the classes of the South and the ideas that unified them. The interests go to the those who knew and understood them bounds to these ideas. Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South*. 63; more on the common man see Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*, 3rd Edition (LSU, Baton Rouge, 1976), 83. Wickliffe, *A Plea for the Education of the People of Kentucky. An Address, Etc.* Laurence Shore, *Southern Capitalists: The Ideological Leadership of an Elite, 1832-1885* (University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 11. Shore noted, "the goal was to make 'slaveholding capitalist the character type basic to the Southern cultural order," 11.

⁶⁴ Helper, *The Impending Crisis Of South*.

⁶⁵ Helper. As educational movements were growing in the 1850s throughout the nation, "slavery and its natural hindrances to the theory of public education and certain other factors somewhat delayed the revival in the education in that region." Edgar Wallace Knight, *Public Education in the South* (Ginn, 1922): 197. Coon, *The Beginnings of Public Education in North Carolina*.

by those with knowledge. The educational policy of ignorance proved to be a major stumbling block to popular education but a key pillar for the perpetuation of slavery and the Southern social order. By understanding ignorance as the educational policy of the South, it begins to make sense why Historian Thomas R. McDaniel characterized education in South Carolina during the nineteenth century as a place where "the rod, the dungeon, and the fool's cap reigned supreme."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Thomas R. McDaniel, ed., *Public Education in South Carolina*, n.d., 7.

Conclusion

In 1869, William M. Burwell wrote in the *DeBow's Review* "the South never utilized the whole intellectual capacity of its people."¹ Although he wrote this in a much larger essay to encourage the South to do good works toward popular education and resist the temptation to return to an educational policy that benefited a small percentage of the population, his words are similar to the pleas of reformers of the antebellum period. Burwell words seem a bit misplaced considering the fact that by 1869 congressional reconstruction was well on its way and public education throughout the South was established during this period. Following the Civil War, new state constitutions were drafted, in which South Carolina completed their draft by September 1865. The remnant of the antebellum ruling class, facing an altered society, returned to their post to rule their state and its occupants as they had before the war. In so doing, the ruling class did not seek to modify the educational policy. South Carolina's State Constitution of 1865 remained absent of any reform toward popular education despite the educational support of Henry Sumner's plea for the state legislature to organize a public-school system for the state during the conventional meeting.² Without congressional reconstruction, the

¹ William M. Burwell, "General Lee as a Teacher," *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*, (1869): 541.

² South Carolina Constitutional convention, *Journal of the Convention of the People of South Carolina, Held in Columbia, S.C., September 1865* (Columbia, S.C., J. A. Selby, printer to the convention, 1865), 55. South Carolina. Constitutional Convention (1865), *Constitution of the State of South Carolina and the Ordinances, Reports and Resolutions Adopted by the Convention of the People Held in Columbia, S.C., September, 1865: Printed by Order of the Legislature* (Columbia, S.C.: J.A. Selby, printer to the state, 1866). "Education and Its Influence on the Character of the State," *The Anderson Intelligencer*, September 21, 1865. It was a belief of some that the Civil War was a sign and that South Carolina would forge a new

educational policy of South Carolina would have potentially remained unchanged from its antebellum course.

The first “legitimate” attempt at a universal system of education began with congressional reconstruction. In fact, the educational system that was developed and implemented during reconstruction should be viewed as a win for reformers but the struggle for popular education continued. Burwell’s words to convince Southern leaders to support popular education by using “all” of the South’s intellectual capacity was not only words of encouragement but words of caution. Although reconstruction birthed a system of education all was not rapturous, but much like the Free School System, the new system would have to vie for survival and success. New obstacles along with old obstacles continued to stifle the growth of popular education.

Southerners, highly upset and distraught over losing the Civil War often harden their hearts toward any legislation implemented during Reconstruction. They considered new policies as inventions of Northern carpetbaggers and corrupt black rulers who disrupted the “progress” of antebellum society. For instance, Warren Wilkes writing in the *Anderson Intelligencer* argued that the South had a usable system of education until the outbreak of the Civil War.³ Wilkes was not alone in his thinking, “Lost Cause” propaganda encouraged many to believe as Wilkes did. One writer penned in the *Charleston Daily News* that the war disrupted popular education but that state would

path of education and reject the "old channels," which neglected the education of the majority. One author noted that the legislators of South Carolina had two choices as they sat out to write a new state constitution. He noted, "one is, to provide for the future that the State be intelligent and for to be a State of freemen; or, if this be neglected, the other alternative is inevitable-to sink to the level of a half-informed people, unable to hold their own against superior intelligence, and the pry of any flood of immigration which may happen to over them."

³ Wilkes Warren, “Warren D Wilkes Comments on Education,” *The Anderson Intelligencer*, July 26, 1866.

reopen its “ancient system of teaching,” and would continue to be friendly to popular education as it has always had.⁴ Denial about South Carolina’s educational past was gobbled up in the romantic ideas produced by Redeemers and “Lost Cause” marketing. Such ideas aided in the continuation of resisting popular education.

Resistance to popular education remained resolute during reconstruction because public schools were accused of promoting mixed-race schools, endorsing black education over white education, training white children to accept Republican rule, and colluding with the federal government to bring about a national system of education. Also, if that was not enough to make the success of the new system difficult, old obstacles such as: the lack of teachers, curriculum and compulsory debates, class prejudices, republican ideology perception of free schools, cost and infrastructure, and the education of women continued to exist.

Overlooking the Southern education policy in the early nineteen-century has led to disconnectedness within the history of white Southern education mainly white Southern attitudes toward popular education following the Civil War. More importantly, this neglect has allowed historians to miss beneficial angles to examine Southern history, how Southern ideas and culture manifested in Southern educational policy, and how Southern education or the lack thereof connects with the political economy of slavery.

Explaining that there was never any intention to educate the white majority in antebellum South Carolina is the very purpose of this dissertation. Each chapter has sought to perform a task, not only to inform how and why the education of the white majority was neglected by the ruling class but also to reveal a part of the working plan

⁴ “They Don’t Like Schools,” *The Charleston Daily News*, May 29, 1868.

that dissenters used to prevent the aims of reformers and the diffusion of knowledge by successfully averting popular education from ever having the opportunity to develop and potentially prosper.

Chapter one, on ideology, looked to explain the intellectual underpinning that dissenters used to manipulate the Free School Act of 1811, the Free School System, and instantaneously the cultural perception of the white majority toward popular education.

Chapter two not only described the plan and hope illustrated by the Free School Act of 1811 but also how dissenters used their positions of influence within the legislature to deny free schools any traction in the popular mind. They did so by classifying free schools as institutions for the poor forcing devoted republican ideological believers to reject free schools or any associated system. This section maintains that dissenters had to continue to guide the popular mind to the conclusion that free schools were incompatible with republican tradition and that they did so by sabotaging the Free School System.⁵

Chapter four gave a necessary detour to provide an understanding of how reformers attempted to counter dissenters control over the popular mind toward popular education. It also provided an account of reformers desires for popular education by way of social commentary on Southern society from the 1820s to the 1840s. This chapter

⁵ To be clear, although much blame is placed on elites for the ignorance of the white majority, they are not exclusively to blame for the lack of popular education in South Carolina but suggest that the ruling did strategically manipulate the lower class, mostly through sabotaging the Free School Act and sustain propaganda of pauperism, to accept the belief that popular education was dishonorable.

served as one of the fasteners to the project because it gave readers a glimpse into what reformers were fighting for and why dissenters were fighting against.

Chapter five, Southern Dependence and Southern Education, situated how the sectional tension of the 1850s forced Southerners to rethink popular education. It explains how the South's conflict with the North created a window of opportunity for reformers to contort and imbue the popular mind with positive arguments for popular education. In addition, this chapter also demonstrated that the habits instituted into the popular mind by dissenters were not customs easily broken.

Chapter six demonstrated that despite the obstacles facing supporters and reformers of education they did use the opportunity of the 1850s to demand change in the state's educational policy. This chapter described how reformers went on the offensive to overcome both the mental and leadership barriers to popular education.

The chapter on dissenters presents a rare glimpse into the world of dissenters. The attack by reformers in the 1850s, the fear of change, and the need to remain in control of the popular mind ideas on education forced dissenters to address their concerns and rejection of popular education tactfully.

The final chapter suggested that the ruling class believed that bridled ignorance of the white majority was necessary to protect and govern the South and maintain the status quo. Hinton Roman Helper's *Impending Crisis* is employed in this section to show that the white majority resistance to popular education was a natural response to the ruling class propaganda. The white majority willingly accepted a message that belittled popular

education, a message they in a short time turned into a tradition and custom, falling into the trap set by dissenters.

This project has not only attempted to rethink popular education in the antebellum period in South Carolina but also reposition the discourse on popular education of the antebellum period to agglutinate it with the general education systems following the Civil War. The problems facing the Universal System of education during and following reconstruction has several origins in the antebellum period. It is the author's belief that the ideological traditions of the ruling class which choked the system in the antebellum period are present in the reconstruction and post-reconstruction period well into the 1950s, albeit dressed and disguised in new arguments with new aims.

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